Baraka

Bernstein

Clifford

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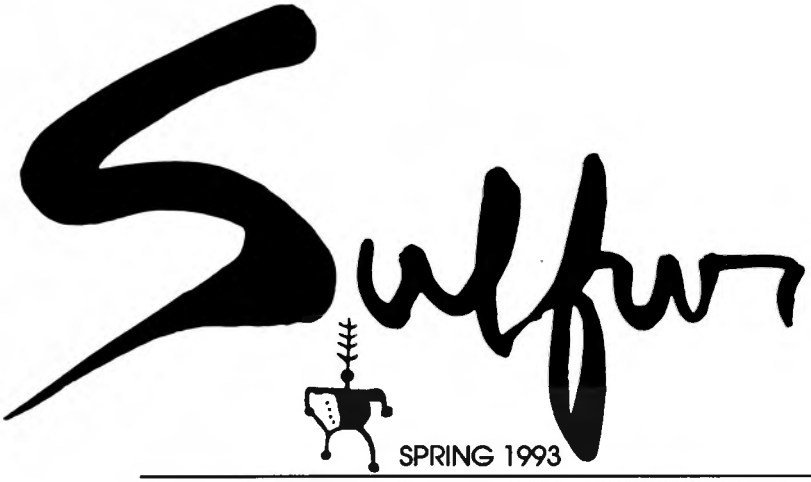

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: Pamela Wye, 1993

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CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
AN EDITORIAL NOTE

Several years ago, I noticed that Michel Deguy's Paris-based magazine, *Poésie*, had done a special issue based entirely on work by the editorial staff, or the masthead. This was the first time I had seen a "masthead issue," and it struck me as an interesting idea, at least one time in a magazine's run. With the exception of a few additions and disappearances, *Sulfur's* masthead has been pretty stable for the past 7 years—a fact I am very proud of. As any regular reader knows, while we all to varying degrees overlap in our senses of what is important in writing and art today, we also have our differences, and, as a group, do not constitute a movement, or even an agreed-upon platform. Because I was on sabbatical leave, fall 1992, I thought it would be a good time to take a vacation from the daily reading of submitted manuscripts, and invite the 11 people who make up *Sulfur's* masthead to offer a 20-page section of either their own work, or work they themselves would choose. This way, potential contributors can see, in ample measure, what we are doing and what we stand for (I have always felt that literary magazine editors have a responsibility to make some of their work available in their magazine on an ongoing basis so as to not stand behind the poesis that their editorial work is, or is not, shaping).

The only non-masthead material in the front part of *Sulfur*#32 is some work by Allen Ginsberg, given to me at Naropa this past summer. All of us at *Sulfur* thought it would be a nice idea to include it now and not hold it until the next regular issue (#34—following Eliot Weinberger's issue, #33, on The Past).

This might be a good spot to clear up something that seems to have been misunderstood by a number of people throughout *Sulfur's* 12 year run: while some of the material in each issue is by various members of the masthead, and while a few things in each issue have been asked for, the magazine is quite open to so-called non-solicited material. A careful reader will notice that in nearly every issue there are several completely new names, and this is because all of us at *Sulfur* believe that one of the key purposes of the magazine is to be open to the work of the young and/or unknown. This includes noticings and brief book reviews too, and I would

especially encourage young writers to query us about commentary they would like to do.

In an attempt to raise some money for advertising, we sent out a donation letter a couple months ago to many of our subscribers and contributors. The result has been heartening, and will enable us to take out some subscription ads in 1993. I would like to thank the following people or organizations here, at this time:

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CHARLES BERNSTEIN
REZNIKOFF'S NEARNESS

I.

1. Charles Reznikoff was born in Brooklyn in 1894. The date is interesting because Reznikoff is somewhat older than the poets of the "second wave" of radical modernism, with whom he is often associated. Zukofsky, for example, was born in 1904, Oppen in 1908, Bunting in 1900, Riding in 1901, Hughes in 1902, while Toomer was born in the same year as Reznikoff. Sterling Brown, with whom Reznikoff shared the great project of using the American historical record of injustice and social barbarism as a primary subject, was born seven years after him.

2. Reznikoff is a bridge figure between Williams, the poet he most resembles, and a decade older than he, and the poets born at the turn of the century, a decade after him. Like Williams, he came from a family in which English was not a native tongue. His parents (like my own grandparents) came from Russia, sometime after 1881; his paternal grandparents joined the family somewhat later.

His mother's father, Ezekiel, never made it to the New World, having died before Reznikoff was born. Ezekiel, a cattle and wheat broker, had written Hebrew verse on his travels. Just after he died his wife destroyed all trace of his writings, fearing his manuscripts might contain material that would create trouble for the family if discovered by the Tzarist authorities.

The destruction of his grandfather's poetry is an emblematic story for Reznikoff and he comes back to it in two poems, the first opening *By the Well of Living and Seeing:*

> My grandfather, dead long before I was born,
> died among strangers; and all the verse he wrote
> was lost—
> except for what
> still speaks through me
> as mine.[1]

The poetic or psychic economy suggested here helps to explain Reznikoff's resolve to continue with his work in the face of intense waves of

indifference, indeed his resolve to ensure that his own verse would not disappear entirely: "I would leave no writing of mine, / if I could help it, / to the mercy of those who loved me."[2] Reznikoff's work echoes this subtext in a number of ways: the poems are an act of recovery—where recovery becomes a project of immense proportion far beyond this initial point of focus. A few times, the poems register the difficulty of this recovery in terms of the poet's loss, or exile from, Hebrew, a language he does not really know (Reznikoff's parents would have spoken Yiddish and increasingly English), but which seems part of his identity.

Reznikoff tells the tale of his parents' life in Russia and in their painfully difficult work in the New York rag trade in scrupulous and informative detail in two remarkable "autobiographical" works, "Early History of a Seamstress" and "Early History of Sewing Machine Operator," as well as in his own continuation of their story in "Needle Trade."[3]

3. Reznikoff attended Boys High School in Brooklyn and from 1910-1911 went to the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. During the following year, he worked as a salesman for his parents' millinery business. But in 1912, remembering that Heine (the reference may at first seem peculiar but begins to make sense) had gone to law school, enrolled at NYU. Reznikoff graduated law school in 1916 and was admitted to the bar the same year.

4. Legal studies provided Reznikoff a sharp contrast to the poetics of metaphysical and Symbolic overtone, of fashionable literary conceits and static ornamentation. Indeed, legal argument provided an analogue for the poetic principles he did find interesting, such as the "brand new verse" of Pound and H.D., which he read in *Poetry* when he was 21 and studying law.[4] It was at this time that he first formulated a poetics that emphasized "the pithy, the necessary, the clear, and plain" [II: 172], principles that, like most of his statements of poetics, stressed what he was breaking away from (the influence of Pound is unmistakable) more than the new poetic space he was inventing.

Remembering his years at law school, Reznikoff writes:

> I found it delightful
> to climb those green heights,
> to bathe in the clear waters of reason
> to use words for their daylight meaning
> and not as prisms
> playing with the rainbows of connotation:
> . . . .
> I had been bothered by a secret weariness
> with meter and regular stanzas

grown a little stale. The smooth lines and rhymes
seemed to me affected, a false stress on words and syllables—
fake flowers
in the streets which I walked
. . . .
The brand new verse some Americans were beginning to write—
after the French "free verse" perhaps
. . . .
seemed to me, when I first read it
right:
not cut to patterns, however cleverly,
nor poured into ready molds.[5]

5. After a very brief attempt to start a law practice, Reznikoff returned to millinery sales, saying his "mind was free" as he waited for hours to see the buyers at Macy's.

Reznikoff claims to have been very good at selling ladies' hats, although his wife, Marie Syrkin, in her marvelous memoir, demurs on this point.[6]

In 1918, *Rhythms*, Reznikoff's first book, was privately printed and distributed—just one year after Pound's first *Cantos*. Reznikoff kept in mind the fate of his grandfather's poetry in choosing to arrange for the printing on his own. He also showed an independence from literary fashion and career that would mark his entire life.

Two years later, in 1920, Samuel Roth published his *Poems* in an edition of 250.

6. In 1927, Reznikoff bought his own press, setting the type and printing *Five Groups of Verse* in an edition of 375 copies, and later *Nine Plays* in an edition of 400 copies. During this time, he was able to stop working entirely, living on a very modest income of $25 per week from his parents.

7. Reznikoff seemed to accept the fact that there was, and would be, little interest in his poetry. But by the late 1920s he had met Zukofsky and George and Mary Oppen; they formed not a school but a small circle of support and mutual interest in each other's work—there was, for a while, a pool of light in a world of poetic darkness:

against the darkness:
a quadrangle of light[7]

8. In 1927 and 1928, Ezra Pound had included in his magazine *The Exile* poems by Williams and Zukofsky, McAlmon and Rakosi, as well as

Reznikoff. In '28, Pound wrote Zukofsky that he ought to bring together a group of younger poets.[8]

In February 1931, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* published a special issue edited by Zukofsky that began with a short statement, "Program 'Objectivists' 1931" immediately followed by an essay entitled "Sincerity and Objectification with Special Reference to Charles Reznikoff." As compared to the far longer manuscript version, the published essay cut references to Reznikoff's neglect and to his plays, altogether eliminating about half the original citations to Reznikoff's work; this process of elimination was radically accelerated in the intervening years so that in Zukofsky's collected essays, *Prepositions* (1977), all references to Reznikoff are removed for the final, citationless, distillation of Zukofsky's thought, now titled simply "An Objective."[9] Reznikoff was not alone in his obsession to cut and keep cutting.

From 1931 to 1932, the Oppens published three books (Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky's *An "Objectivists" Anthology)* under the imprint, To Publishers, with Zukofsky as the press editor.

In 1934, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and the Oppens founded the Objectivist Press, with the advice of Williams and Pound. That first year they published Williams's *Collected Poems,* edited by Zukofsky with an introduction by Stevens, in an edition of 500 copies. Williams put up $250 of which $150 was refunded.[10] Reznikoff was much surprised to find their first book reviewed by *The New York Times;* it sold better than expected. In 1934, the Objectivist Press also published Oppen's *Discrete Series;* after that, Oppen stopped writing for 20 years. Finally, in the same year, the press published the initial installment of Reznikoff's *Testimony,* with an introduction by Kenneth Burke, in an edition of 200 copies.

Three years later, in 1937, New Directions was founded, and began publishing Pound, Williams, and others.

9. Reznikoff met Marie Syrkin in 1929 and they were married the next year.

At around this time (Hindus says 1928, but Syrkin says 1930), Reznikoff's parents' business went bad and, like many other small businesses during the Depression, they went into debt. Not only had he lost his meager income, but Reznikoff was now obliged to help out his family. Reluctantly, he took a job at *Corpus Juris,* a legal encyclopedia, as a copywriter. Eventually, he was fired from *Corpus Juris*. Syrkin recalls the editor telling him, "When I hire a carpenter I don't want a cabinetmaker."[11]

10. From 1938 to 1939 Reznikoff went to Hollywood for a $75 a week job as a quite peripheral writer for a movie studio where an old friend worked. This period is described in his posthumously published novel, *The Manner Music,* a book that includes prose adaptations—less musical, less shapely—of at least nine of his late poems. The novel ends with the protagonist—

an unrecognized, perhaps unrecognizable, artist—burning all of his work, again bringing to mind the destruction by fire of Reznikoff's grandfather's verse: "He tore up everything, everything he has ever written and burnt it. They found the heap of ashes next to him when they took him to the hospital."[12]

When Reznikoff returned to New York, he worked at a number of odd editorial and research jobs, including writing a history of the Jewish community of Charleston and editing the papers of Louis Marshall.

11. Between 1941 and 1959 Reznikoff did not publish any books, although he continued to work on his poems and his anti-epic, *Testimony*.

12. In 1948, Reznikoff received a letter from Williams: "A confession and an acknowledgment! In all these years that I have owned a book of yours, nineteen years! a book you gave me in 1929 I never so much opened it—except to look at it cursorily. And now, during an illness, I have read it and I am thrilled with it."[13]

13. In the 1950s, while Syrkin was teaching at Brandeis, Reznikoff became managing editor, at $100 a week, of *Jewish Frontier*, a labor Zionist monthly with which Syrkin was involved. "With no aptitude for journalism," Syrkin recalls, "he despised the facile generalizations of the craft and the superficial editorials. . .in response to a current crisis. . . . I had to contain his natural inclination to reduce pages to paragraphs and paragraphs to sentences."

The printers, however, appreciated his incredible meticulousness. "That he was a 'poet,' a designation privately equated with schlemiel, explained any failure to fit into a familiar mold."[14]

14. When he turned 68, in 1962, New Direction published a selection of his poems, *By the Waters of Manhattan,* with an introduction by C. P. Snow, and subsequently published the first volume of *Testimony*. In 1968, however, the publisher turned down the second volume of *Testimony* and Reznikoff arranged to have it printed privately in an edition of 200.

15. In 1975, Black Sparrow published *Holocaust,* based, as *Testimony,* not on firsthand reports but exclusively on court records, here from the Nuremberg and the Eichman trials.

16. In 1976, with the first volume of his *Complete Poems* in press from Black Sparrow, Charles Reznikoff died.

II.

The Abbaye de Royaumont, not far from Paris, was a center of Christendom in the thirteenth century, when it as built. During the Revolution, it sustained heavy damages and the abbey has never been fully reconstructed. In recent years Royaumont has been used as a literary, music, and business conference center.

In the Fall of 1989, Royaumont was the site for a conference on the American "Objectivist" Poets, a group more prominent in the French map of American poetry than in many of our homemade maps. The library of Royaumont, with its 40-foot ceilings and walls lined with ancient books, was an extraordinary setting for an occasion honoring four relatively obscure American poets, whose parents had come from Europe from Jewish shtetels to settle into the New World. Even more extraordinary, the conference began at sunset on the Friday night upon which fell Rosh Hashonah, the Jewish New Year.

At the invitation of Emmanuel Hocquard, who has translated Reznikoff's The Manner Music *into French, Michael Palmer, Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, David Bromige, and I had come from America to speak on one or another of the "objectivists," while Carl Rakosi gave a reading and commented on many of the talks presented.*

I had brought along a tape of Reznikoff reading in 1974 at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State, along with a transcript of the 46 poems, and fragments of poems, he had selected for that reading, which I had cut and pasted together, as he must have done in constructing this sequence, from almost every section and period of his Complete Poems. *The following remarks are based on that talk.*

1. How does a poem, these poems, enter the world?

2. —Measured and scaled, particular and necessary: that would be one answer. Reznikoff's gives his own "platform as a writer of verse," as he wryly puts it in an introduction to the reading, given when he was 80, at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State:

> Salmon and red wine
> and a cake fat with raisins and nuts:
> no diet for a writer of verse
> who must learn to fast
> and drink water by measure. [15]

Reznikoff's selection, at the Poetry Center reading, of work from over 60 years of writing is a masterful weave—"mastermix"—creating not "the intricate medallions the Persians know"[16] but a discrete series of poetic

encounters that marks his work from beginning to end, without end or beginning.

3. *Rhythms,* in 1918, marks the invention of literary cubo-serialism. By cubo-seriality, I mean to identify the more discreet development that characterizes Reznikoff's work from that point 1918 on—the permutation of briefly etched, identifiable details that don't quite stand on their own and that are separated by a gap, or interval, that requires a full stop. The prefix suggests rhetorically consonant permutations of angles of view on related (or linked) subjects.

4. From his 1927 collection *Five Groups of Verse* (which included *Rhythms),* Reznikoff numbered each of his often quite tiny poems and ran them together on the page, rather than isolating each poem on its own page (as he had up to this point) or separating the poems in some other way. This very explicit, even intrusive, numbering expresses Reznikoff's radical commitment to the poetic sequence, or series, as details open to reordering. In Reznikoff, the process of composition is as much a matter of the shaping of sequences as of the creation of particular elements of the sequence: the otherwise unrepresentable (and overlooked) space between poems has become the location of the work's poesis of unfolding and refolding, separating and recongealing. In Reznikoff, the meaning of the poem is always twofold: both in the detail and in its sequence. That is, the detail works in counterpoint to its locus in a series to create the meaning of the poem.

Reading Reznikoff formally means attending to the relation of the part to the whole (and the whole to the part) in his work, along lines that also suggest the relation of the shot to the sequence (in film and photography), surface to depth (in painting but also in rhetoric), the fragment to the total (in philosophy but also in *Kabalah).*

To create the text of his 1974 reading, Reznikoff stitched together 46 individual bits and pieces. As with any work of disjunctive collage, each frame or unit recontexualizes the subsequent frame or unit. Reznikoff's "groups" (as he sometimes called them) are not governed by a principle external to the compositional process—his series are not ordered narratively, or chronologically, or historically; there is no necessarily logical or causal connection between the links of the chain. Rather, Reznikoff employs a variety of thematic and tonal shifts to create an overall "musical" arrangement, to use his own phrase for the process. What Reznikoff calls, right from the first book, "Rhythms":

> "The ceaseless weaving of the uneven water."[17]

5. There is no poet more dedicated to foregrounding the detail and the particular than Reznikoff and no poet more averse to blending these details into a consuming or totalizing form. The numbers that obtrude into the visual field of almost every page of Reznikoff's verse represent both this commitment and aversion. This is not to deny that the individual sections add up to a larger form, but to affirm that the particularity and integrity of each detail is not diminished by the newly forming whole. While this structural allegory of polis echoes through the work of several of his contemporaries, notably Williams, Oppen and Zukofsky, it is Reznikoff's tenacity combined with an uncanny lack of didacticism that especially characterizes his approach.

Reznikoff rejected the "depth" of field simulated by various realist and mimetic self-centering procedures in which each detail is subordinated to an overall image or theme or meaning. By constantly intercutting, or jump cutting, between and among and within material, the poems surface of local particularities gains primacy, in contrast to the rhetorical depth of narrative closure that is aimed for in such "epic" collage formats as *The Wasteland* and certain of the *Cantos* (not to mention more conventional poetry). Reznikoff's network of stoppages is anti-epic. It enacts an economy of perambulation and coincidence, of loss rather than accumulation (a general rather than a restricted economy in Bataille's terms).

> Scrap of paper
> blown about the street
> you would like to be cherished, I suppose,
> like a bank-note.[18]

Pound's disinterest in Reznikoff is foundational.

6. Parataxis is a manner of transition. Elements are threaded together like links on a chain, periodically rather than hierarchically ordered and without the subordination of part to whole. The *OED* defines parataxis as "the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination) between them."

Parataxis is a grammatical state of adjacency, of being next to or side by side. Besideness. As the mind lies next to its object, or one finds oneself a neighbor in conversation, or in reflection one thought follows the next. A nonlinear network of interconnections.

7. As a term of art, adjacency is distinguished from adjoining or abutting, as land that is adjacent to a common square, but no where touches.

Reznikoff's is an art of adjacency, each frame carefully articulated and set beside the next.

8. Reznikoff's cubo-seriality is modular and multidirectional, marking a series of sites available to rearrangement in ever new constellations of occurrence. (Reznikoff's own refiguring of his lifework at the 1976 Poetry Center reading is a model for this potential for reconfiguration.) Resembling the long walks through the city he took every morning, Reznikoff's poems move from site to site without destination, each site inscribing an inhabitation, every dwelling temporary—contingent but sufficient.

> Those of us without house and ground
> who leave tomorrow
> must keep our baggage light
> a psalm, perhaps a dialogue. . .[19]

—so Reznikoff continues his "platform," as he calls it at the Poetry Center reading. "Without house and ground" hints of the wandering of exile and the absence of foundations, but this nomadic poetry refuses exile in its insistence that grounds are only and always where one sleeps, a view suggested by the poem's epigraph from the *Mishnah (Aboth* 6:4): "and on the ground shalt thou sleep and thou shalt live a life of trouble." Exile suggests expulsion from a native land, but in Reznikoff's verse the native is what lies at one's feet, ground for walking on: so no loss of prior foundations, no absent center, as in Edmond Jabès, but "finding as founding" to use Stanley Cavell's Emersonian phrase from *This New Yet Unapproachable America.*

Perhaps there are those who possess house and land, who can afford to live higher off the ground, imagining possession as a prophylactic for loss. Damage is given, not chosen. The nomad, neither uprooted or uprooting, roots around, reroutes. Reznikoff's new world is not one of absence, but neither is it one of plenty.

> Like a tree in December
> after the winds have stripped it
> leaving only trunk and limbs
> to ride and outlast
> the winter's blast.

The "writer of verse," like the nomad, "must learn to fast / and drink water by measure." Reznikoff's baggage is, literally, the *light* that emanates from conversation and song (dialogue and psalm), exactly the measures of his verse. This is a poetry not of dislocation or banishment but of the "blinding" intensities of location as relocation, relocalization.

9. A typology of Reznikoff's parataxis would begin by distinguishing his non-developmental seriality from sequential seriality, to use Joseph Conte's

terms in *Unending Design*, a distinction that is in some ways similar to that between analytic and synthetic cubism.

Certainly, the modulation of disjunctiveness between poems in a Reznikoff "group of verse" is one of the poetry's most distinctive features. As Burton Hatlen has argued, reading Reznikoff means reading each of his groups as a series, not as autonomous poems.[20] Such readings will need to take account of the fact that Reznikoff reordered the sequences of his groups in ways that underscore the modular, permutable, status of each discrete poem.

Reznikoff's groups are composed by varying the degree of continuity and discontinuity among the sections. The most typical relation between sections is one of simultaneity of occurrences, as if each poem were preceded by an implied "meanwhile."[21] However, some of the modules of a series do share thematic interconnections, with subject clusters connected by family resemblances, commonly involving a permutation of tangentially related motifs, with shifts among themes varying from slight to abrupt. Reznikoff's "Similes" (II:103:45) demonstrates this principle within a single poem, presenting four images each of which seem teasingly related to the others but which share no single stateable topic. Sometimes small thematic clusters are placed within larger nonthematic series. These may be given an overtitle—a sequence within a series—as "Winter Holidays" or "Early History of a Writer," or the cluster may simply share the same subject, as the motifs of the subway, birds, rain, and the moon identified by Hatlen in his reading of *Jerusalem the Golden*. Moreover, some of Reznikoff's works are framed by a single theme or subject, such as the Biblical studies of "Editing and Glosses" in *By the Waters of Manhattan: An Annual* (1929), or, most prominently, his books, *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, which, while thematically linked, are nonetheless serial rather than sequential.

10. Seriality encompasses a vast array of modernist and contemporary poetry, much of it better known for its nonsequentiality than Reznikoff's verse. The usefulness of the term depends on the degree to which the different types of serialism are distinguished. The early modernist history of seriality could easily start with Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1912), the most original rethinking of poetic form in the period. One might also think of the serial ordering of long individual poems in Pound's *Cantos* or Zukofsky's *"A"*. Conte identifies Williams's *Spring and All* (1923) as the prototype for serial form, noting the 27 numbered, untitled poems that are interpreted with prose improvisations. But consider also Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), with its interspersing of loosely associated poems and prose.[22]

A pre-(modern) history of the serial poem would have much to account for, including, famously, Buchner's *Wozzeck*, but equally Dickinson's fascicles—the most radical serial poems of 19th-Century America. (I keep thinking of Dickinson's lines "This world is not conclusion. / A sequel

stands beyond / Invisible as Music— / But positive, as Sound—," where *sequel* is a possible variant for *Species.*[23]) In *Emily Dickinson: Quires of Light,* Marta Werner makes a convincing case that what we now know as Dickinson's letters or prose, are, to a surprisingly large extent, better classified as serial fragments.[24] The relation of fragments to seriality leads to a further deepening of both categories; Hölderlin's late fragments would be particularly relevant to consider in this regard, especially as Adorno emphasizes the paratactic nature of his style.

During the period following the Second World War, the most influential conception of the serial poem came from Jack Spicer, who contrasted the "one night stand" of the individual poems to a composition by book in which the order of the poems, like each individual poem, is determined by "dictation." Both Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser were comrades with Spicer in this project.

Zukofsky's great cut-up collage, "Poem Beginning 'The'"—composed of 330 numbered lines, prefaced by a list of several dozen sources for the work—was written in 1926. As in much of Zukofsky's poetry, the poem's lines flow from one to next, working in counterpoint to the disjunctive nature of the sources and the numerical framing. The process of running-in such disparate material by the use of intricate syntactic, syllabic and thematic patterning, which characterizes much of Zukofsky's *"A,"* is a formal practice quite distinct from Reznikoff's cubo-seriality.[25] Many of Zukofsky's shorter poems are, like Reznikoff's, presented in numbered sequences. But unlike Reznikoff's splinters, Zukofsky's individual poems in *ALL* are longer and stand up by themselves as autonomous works. Zukofsky's short poetry, less dependent on the series, makes less of it.

More directly akin to Reznikoff's cubo-seriality is George Oppen's *Discrete Series* (1932–34); the work of Lorine Niedecker, whose discrete seriality is explicitly shown only in the most comprehensive collection of her work, *From this Condensary,* edited by Robert Bertholf; the "Love Songs" (1915-1917) of Mina Loy; and Langston Hughes's *Montage of A Dream Deferred* (1951).

More recent work that continues a poetics of adjacency, in which elements are discrete, incomplete, and recombinatory, would include—among *many* others—George Oppen's "Of Being Numerous," Robert Creeley's *Words, Pieces* and "In London"; Ron Silliman's "new," e.g., permutable, sentences; Lyn Hejinian's *The Cell,* Ted Pearson's *Evidence,* Tom Raworth's *A Serial Biography,* Ted Berrigan's "Tamborine Life," and John Ashbery's "Europe."

One criteria that usefully differentiates paratactic forms is the degree to which the parts are mobile or recombinable. On one end of the spectrum there is nonserial parataxis, bound to narrative or chronology, such as in the Homeric epics and the Bible. (There is another way of reading the Torah that suggests its nonsequential undertow: the Kabalistic practice of

gematria, invented by Abraham Abulafia in the 13th century, which involves the recombination of numerically equivalent words and in some ways resembles anagrammatic and aleatoric methods of recombination.)

A second category, in which the arrangement of the elements is intrinsic to the meaning, covers most serial poems. Further recombination is, by definition, possible without compromising the prosodic structure of the work; nonetheless the meaning of the series is dependent, to a greater or lesser extent, on the particular array or temporal ordering that had been made or the procedure that has been used. By temporal ordering, I mean works that foreground the process of composition (elements are ordered as they were written); by array—nontemporal and nonsystematic configurations of modular elements; by procedure—external or explicit principles of design used to order elements of a series.

A third category consists of modular poems that have not yet been serialized: poems in which the arrangement of elements is extrinsic. In the strictest sense, few works fit into this category since the format of books binds an order onto even the most discontinuous set of leaves. In a broader sense, there are a number of serial works that are not intended to be read only or principally in the order in which they are printed. (Serial *reading* opens all works to recombination. My favorite image of readerly seriality is David Bowie, in Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth,* watching a bank of TVs all of which were rotating their channels.) Robert Grenier's *Sentences*—500 discrete articulations each on a separate index card and housed in a blue Chinese box—is the best example I know of extrinsic seriality, though two other boxes of cards also come to mind: Jerome Rothenberg and Harris Lenowitz's *Gematria 27*(27 recombinable numeric word equivalences) and Thomas McEvilley's cubo-serial *4* (44 four-line poems). In principle, hypertext is an ideal format for this mode of composition since it allows a completely nonlinear movement from link to link: no path need be specified and each reading of the data base creates an alternative series. What's remarkable is that this structure is already a potential in Reznikoff's first book in 1918.[26]

I have in mind two other criteria for differentiating serial poems (though what good all this classification will do I can't say; likely not much): the degree of congruity or incongruity among elements of the series (this might be called coefficient of weirdness, with cubo-seriality, for example, having a low coefficient) and the extent of found or preexisting material used in the poem.

11. In Reznikoff's cubo-seriality, it's a matter of the *cut:* as in the cut of a dress or of a fabric. Also a double cutting: the shapeliness of the lines as units inside each poem (the cut of each poem, Reznikoff as miniaturist); and the rhythm between the poems (the intercutting). The numbered poem as unit, but also the line as unit: isolating / emphasizing discrete words or

word pairs, half-puns and off rhymes and echoes and repetitions; modulating—pushing against—too easy a rhythm, too quick a reading:

> Her work was to count linings—
> the day's seconds in dozens. *(Poems,* 1920; I:29:5)[27]

12. Reznikoff is "literary realist" only if one unit is considered in isolation, as has been the assumption of most readings of his work. Understood serially, in terms of their plasticity, the poems can no longer be read with the trivializing appreciation of being plain, descriptive, flat, simple, artless, and unassuming; or as being without rhetorical affect or "modernist discontinuity." Indeed, the early negative reviews of Reznikoff's works reveal a difficulty with his poetry that suggests his radical approach better than many of the more positive subsequent assessments: "a fragmentary style that annoys and bewilders," "cumulative effect. . .is promising shavings"; "He is unable to focus. . .apparent incoherence" [Malcolm Cowley]; "half-baked, [showing] a lack of development."[28]

13. Subject matter is literally *beside* the point of this formal innovation, which would be possible with different subject matter and even without explicit subject matter (as in Stein). As Reznikoff notes, "'Half the meaning [of poetry] is the music'"[29] Milton Hindus, apparently reporting on a conversation with Reznikoff, remarks: "Literature was capable of making something out of nothing (indeed, it was Flaubert's dream to write a work about 'nothing at all'); it was capable of making interesting (by the quality of its style, by its emphasis, by the purity and freshness of its language, by the depth of its feeling or thought) the most commonplace and the least exciting or unusual occurrences. . ."[30] The comparison between Reznikoff and Flaubert seems particularly apt on the question of style; it's incredible that the exquisite stylizations of Reznikoff's poems have been lost in the tendency to call him, virtually, styleless.

14. Reznikoff does speak of poetry as the communication of feeling—but he is explicit that this feeling, in an "objective" poem, is not expressed as the direct personal statement of the author.

Reznikoff's manner, or method, as he calls it: the feeling comes *indirectly* as a result of the *selection of objects* and the "music" that composes the object.[31] It is a matter of the cut and the cutting.

15. Jewish *forms* (not just themes): the idea of Jewish holiness (blessedness): in the detail, the everyday: every activity, every moment, holy: "How brilliant a green the grass is, / how blinding white the snow."[32]

In Jewish thought, the holiness of the ordinary can be traced to the 18th-century founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem, as well as further back

to earlier Jewish mystics.[33] In orthodox Judaism, as in other orthodox religions, the holy is external, graspable, if at all, only through law and ritual; it is an "object of dogmatic knowledge" as Gershom Scholem puts it (p. 10). In Jewish mysticism, holiness is present in everyday—"low"—activities and not separated out to particular sites, such as the synagogue, or to particular times, such as the High Holy Days. —Just as we might say, following Reznikoff (or Duchamp), that the aesthetic is not confined to the "beauty" of traditional forms, but is fully present in the quotidian. Kabalism is anti-dualistic, seeking to break down the distinction between God in Itself (God on high, set apart) and God in its appearance, in its immanence (in the low, a part). *There is no separation:* for holiness is found in the most common deeds and language, the most base and vulgar acts: the holiness of walking, the holiness of drinking, the holiness of sitting, the holiness of talking, the holiness of looking, the holiness of touching, the holiness of witness:

> Not because of victories
> I sing
> having none,
> but for the common sunshine,
> the breeze,
> the largess of the spring. . .
>
> not for a seat upon the dais
> but at the common table.[34]

Allen Ginsberg's litany of "holy"s in "Footnote to Howl" invokes the holiness of the common—"The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy! / Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in eternity. . . / The bum's as holy as the seraphim!"[35]; indeed, I would suggest that Ginsberg's poetics derive equally from Blake, Whitman, and Reznikoff—an interesting trio (even if this extravagance conflates Williams with Reznikoff).

16. Gershom Scholem points out that a positive attitude toward language distinguishes Kabalism from other mystical traditions:

> Kabalists who differ in almost everything else are at one in regarding language as something more precious than an inadequate instrument for contact between human beings. To them, Hebrew, the holy tongue, is not simply a means of expressing certain thoughts, born out of a certain convention and having a purely conventional character. . .Language in its purest form, that is, Hebrew. . .reflects the fundamental

spiritual nature of the world. . .Man's common language. . .
reflects the creative language of God. (p. 17)

17. It comes to this question: what is the status of the detail, the particular in this work? Why is it so important? For Reznikoff, as for Williams, the detail is not a "luminous particular" in Pound's sense—not extraordinary but exactly ordinary, even if indeed luminous. So, then, why this particular detail, and then that one?

Metonymy: the fragment as substitute for, hinting at, something else, something that only it can stand for, is an instance of—a manifestation or emanation. The part for the (w) holy.

Witness of the detail understood as metonymic.

Scholem, again, is a useful guide. Kabalism rejects the allegorical for the symbolic, where allegory—"the representation of an expressible something by another expressible something"—is akin to the literary conceits and Symbolism that Reznikoff rejected. In contrast, "the mystical symbol is an expressible sensation of something which lies beyond the sphere of expression. . .Every living thing is endlessly correlated with the whole of creation. . .everything mirrors everything else" (p. 27)

Reznikoff, a secular poet refreshed by "the clear waters of reason," committed "to use words for their daylight meaning" is no mystic, if mysticism is understood as elevating his work above "the common table," as he puts it in a poem entitled "Te Deum." Reznikoff is not a poet of the ecstatic, directed to the beyond, but a poet of the near, the close at hand: of a returning to oneself as to the world.

18. Fragment as shard—of a broken or cracked totality that cannot be represented in it's totality (the taboo against graven images) but only as splinters (of light), details. ". . .but the cracked glass held in the frame."[36]

19. The ordinary, the everyday, the common, the neglected, the disregarded / unacknowledged as the site of Paradise *(There is no other—only recover): Arts de faire* the art of doing, as in, *The Practice of Everyday Life:*

As I was wondering with my unhappy thoughts,
I looked and saw
that I had come into a sunny place
familiar and yet strange.
"Where am I?" I asked a stranger. "Paradise."
"Can this be Paradise?" I asked surprised,
for there were motor-cars and factories.

"It is," he answered. "This is the sun that shone on Adam once the very wind that blew upon him too."[37]

Looked and saw: it is this twofold action that the poems constantly replay; looking is never enough, for it shows only what can be seen by using light; in contrast, the world may be beheld, beholded—held, cradled, rocked. The very wind.

20. First-generation immigrant to America not as exile (as it was for Jabès coming to France: Europe already "inhabited") but as founder—one who finds/inhabits and one who makes new a language (a new world). It is Reznikoff's mother who says, "We are a lost generation. . .It is for our children to do what they can."[38] For Reznikoff, finding as founding means finding as foundering (to fall to the ground, to come to grief).

21. The recovery of the ordinary: then was it lost?

22. NOT flatness or absence of rhetoric but. . .a *nearness* to the world not seen as "nature" but as social (urban). Materials of the world at hand, as found: *words* as materials.

Not, that is, reports of things seen (narrow definition of the "objectivist" as ocular or transparent imagism) but bearing witness to things not seen, overlooked. Entering into the word as a descent, not (Idealized) ascent, to borrow Simone Well's terms.

23.

Hanukkah
In a world where each man must be of use
and each thing useful, the rebellious Jews
light not one light but eight—
not to see by but to look at.[39]

Delight. Finding this light in. "Not to see by but to look at" in multiple, serial array. Not sight but display. A Festival of lights.

24. "In *Testimony,*" Reznikoff tells an interviewer, "the speakers whose words I use are all giving testimony about what they actually lived through. The testimony is that of a witness in court—*not a statement of what he felt but of what he heard or saw.*[40] In "First, there is the Need," Reznikoff writes:

With respect to the treatment of subject matter in verse and the use of the term "objectivist" and "objectivism," let me again refer to the rules with respect to testimony in a court of law. Evidence to be admissible in a trial cannot state conclusions

> of fact: it must state the facts themselves. For example, a witness in an action for negligence cannot say: the man injured was negligent crossing the street. He must limit himself to a description of how the man crossed. . .The conclusions of fact are for the jury and let us add, in our case, for the reader. (p. 8)

Philosophically, however, description is always an epistemological question: the *act* of describing constitutes what is described; this act is never neutral. Witnessing is less a matter of "sight" than of action, not static but dynamic. In Reznikoff, witnessing opposes the predawn, preprocessed conclusion: it *unfolds.*

25. Witness versus distance versus assimilation versus exile.

26. Nearness as attitude of address: not isolated, deanimated "images" of distantiated ocular evidence. The *intimacy* of address, the fondling/comment/intrusion into the "material" is a nearing toward a dwelling, making an habitation:

> Rails in the subway,
> what did you know of happiness,
> when you were ore in the earth;
> now the electric lights shine upon you.[41]

In the Dembo interview (p. 110), Reznikoff reports that a Japanese listener had questioned the last line of one of his poems, presumably because it violated the ideal of Haiku—a violation that is just the point of his practice of comment on or interference into, the scene:

> What are you doing in our street among the automobiles, horse?
> How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn?[42]

Just as the absence of the first-person pronoun in this poem marks its break from traditional expressive poetry, so the use of the second-person pronoun marks its break from an ocular imagism.

27. The poetics of adjacency are aversive detachment and irony associated with the "high" modernism of Eliot, or, more accurately, the tradition of Eliot. Are you apart from the language or a part of it?—What we do is to take back language from symbolic allusions and metaphysical contraptions. Yet this swings back to the question of exile, as Reznikoff laments his exile from Hebrew in his most Jabèsian moment:

How difficult for me is Hebrew:
even the Hebrew for *mother,* for *bread,* for *sun*
is foreign. How far have I been exiled, Zion.[43]

To be exiled from one's language is to be lost as a son or daughter, to be a foreigner in one's own tongue, as Jabès says the writer, as Jew, is exiled even in her own language. Since the Jewish tradition imparts to the word a fundamental spiritual nature, this exile from a language that one has never learned suggests the deepest sense of spiritual disconnectedness. Yet the poem also touches on the idea, fundamental to anti-semiticism, that all Jews, even monolingual native speakers of English or German or French, have a "hidden language" to which they owe fundamental allegiance—a belief that, if internalized by the Jew, incites self-hatred, as Sander Gilman discusses in *Jewish Self-Hatred.*

Like many of his contemporaries, Reznikoff was a second-language speaker of English and it was no doubt his newness to English that contributed to the newness of his approach to founding an American poetry broken off from Island English, forged by syntax and music previously unheard in the language. Reznikoff's poetics of location as relocalization is not a poetry of exile. Yet loss rips through this poetry, like hot water spurting from a frozen geyser.

The Hebrew of your poets, Zion,
is like oil upon a burn,
cool as oil;
after work,

the smell in the street at night
of the hedge in flower.
Like Solomon,
I have married and married the speech of strangers;
none are like you, Shulamite.[44]

28. The social engagement of the Jewish secular left meant not assuming the "social" as an abstract, static entity but as something to be located, particularized.

In the poetics of nearness, others exist prior to oneself; you do not look out onto other people as if through a preexisting subjectivity, but find whomever you may be as person, as poet, in relation to them, by virtue of your acknowledgment of their suffering, which is to say their circumstance or bearing in the world. This is the moral grounding of Reznikoff's work.

29. Vividness not as design but texture:

I have neither the time nor the weaving skills, perhaps,
for the intricate medallions the Persians know;
my rugs are the barbaric fire-worshipper's:
how blue the waters flow,
how red the fiery sun
how brilliant a green the grass is
how blinding white the snow.[45]

30. Witness as care / in-volved / as care-taken, caretaker, care in the language, for the world. Language is caretaker of the world.

31. Witness/testimony as "self-cancellation" so that the language/event speaks of/for itself (modernist autonomy), as Reznikoff remarks in "First, there is the Need," quoting an article on Zen that discusses the "forgetfulness of self" (p. 3).

Compare *Testimony: The structure of event:* constellation of particulars: picture is *produced* by this *method,* not presumed.[46]

32. Nearness/unfolding of event breaks down the subject-object split. Subject/object; observer/observed; the para-noia of the objective depersonalized gaze. "apart and alone, / beside an open window / and behind a closed door."[47]

Here these dualities collapse onto one another, the distantiation/irony is collapsed, the observer enters into the observed through a process of participatory mourning: "The room is growing dark, / but the brass knob of the closed door shines— / *ready for use.*"[48]

I would be the rock
about which the water is
flowing; and I would be the water flowing
about the rock.
And am both and neither-
being *flesh*.[49]

33. "The infinite shines through the finite and makes it more real" (Scholem, p. 28). Dickinson's "finite infinity":

There is a solitude of space
A solitude of sea
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be
Compared with that profounder site
That polar privacy

A soul admitted to itself—
Finite Infinity.[50]

34. It's a question of the poem's attitude toward its materials: condescension, sentimentality, impersonality, identification, misidentification, detachment, erasure, appropriation, approbation, deafness, blindness, scorn, ecstasy, depression, anxiety, hypocrisy, reflection, management, control, possession, flirtatious, annihilating.

35. Serial composition, one detail adjacent to the next, one perspective permuted with another, refuses the binary. Oppen:

There are things
We live among 'and to see them
Is to know ourselves'

Occurrence, a part
Of an infinite series[51]

36. My aim not to explain the poems but to make them more opaque.

37. The sensation of not understanding, comprehending (say in Zukofsky or Stein): poems charged with the intractability, the ineffability, of the world.

I like this secret walking
in the fog;
unseen, unheard,
among the bushes
thick with drops;
the solid path invisible
a rod away—
and only the narrow present is alive.[52]

Reznikoff's very extreme attitude toward elision and condensation has the supplemental effect of producing density in exact proportion to its desire for clarity. This is not the clarity of conventional poetic or expository discourse because its poetic space has been transformed into a gravitational field in which every word matters in the sense of having matter, musical or notional weight.

In "Early History of a Writer," Reznikoff recounts how a friend had applied Kittredge's method of microanalysis to some of his early poems:

he read my verse as I had never read verse before,
scrutinizing it, phrase by phrase
and word by word, thought and image, thought and
sound. . .

Reznikoff immediately realizes that this method was similar to what he had at law school—

prying sentences open to look for the exact meaning;
weighing words to choose only those that had meat for my
purpose
and throwing the rest away as empty shells.
I, too, could scrutinize every word and phrase
as if in a document or the opinion of a judge
and listen, as well, for the tones and overtones,
leaving only the pithy, the necessary, the clear and plain.[53]

Reznikoff asks that we pry his words open, listening for the tones and overtones—a way of reading that intensifies the conflict between "the clear and plain" and "the necessary," between the accessible and the ineffable: for when words are weighed and measured for their undertones as well as their piths, the empty shells that fall away, like scales falling from "unseeing eyes," leave only the "narrow present" of the fog.

38. "A poet's words can pierce us. And that is of course *casually* connected with the use that they have in our life. And it is also connected with the way in which, conformably to this use, we let our thoughts roam up and down in the familiar surroundings of the words."[54]

39. William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein are the paradigmatic modernist poets of the ordinary. Just as Williams found the poetic in the back-lot "cinders // in which shine the broken // pieces of a green / bottle," so Stein found the poetic in the materials of the poem, "actual word stuff, not thoughts for thoughts," to use Williams's formulation.[55]

For Reznikoff, a poetry of the everyday is a poetry of the city. As he remarks in his introduction to the Poetry Center reading, his pervasive urbanism marks a decisive break with the nature poetry of the verse tradition. Moreover, Reznikoff's is a poetry of the found, a disposition apparent in the found details of the everyday that people his poems, but never more evident than in the found material of *Testimony*, Reznikoff's testament to the foundering of America and to the possibility of its founding in fondling, call it care in, the everyday.

40. I've been told that Reznikoff disliked obscurity and would certainly not have wanted his work to be characterized as obscure. Yet Reznikoff, from the beginning, seemed to expect that obscurity was the likely outcome for his poetic work and seemed to accept that with remarkable equanimity. Perhaps he understood the nature, the social structure, of obscurity better than his contemporaries. Neglect, disregard—the socially obscure, the forgotten and repressed, the overlooked—this was his subject.

Hiding in plain sight you may never be found: if sight is not to "See by but to look at," not to use but behold.

41. Reznikoff's investigations have something of the sublimity that Wittgenstein assigns to logic, but which might be assigned equally to poetry:

> . . .it is rather of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. . .as if by this end we had to hunt down new facts. . . .We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand. . .
>
> Something we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.)[56]

Reznikoff's poetry reminds us of very general facts that we already knew—are in plain view—but which we have difficulty accounting for. Above all, we have difficulty accounting for the fact that the poetry is *difficult*, because it doesn't seem, at first, to be difficult at all, but patent; as if the difficulty of such patency isn't the first thing we might wish to deny (repress).

42. Reznikoff in an interview ten days before his death: "Whatever the difficulties, your business is to write what you think you should. You owe that much to yourself and to other humans, too."[57]

43. The perspective here is extreme only if it's extreme to read a poem's forms as an inextricable part of its content. Nor does it stretch the point to insist, against all odds, that Reznikoff's formal innovations are essential for understanding what his work is "about" and that to neglect these features is to repress what he has labored to say.

I've often heard Reznikoff damned with the faint praise of his accessibility, as if he is a kind of Jewish, urban Frost, or the Norman Rockwell of poetry—ashcan snapshots of city life. Ironically, it's this very surface of accessibility that has tended to dissipate interest in his work. In

the absence of recognition of the formal and phenomenological intensities, even opacities, of this work, it can seem as his detractors charge—without literary interest, pointless. [58]

If Reznikoff is accessible, it is an accessibility so fragile as to make him, for many readers, more difficult to read seriously and thoroughly than his apparently less accessible, but more often accessed, contemporaries. The history of Reznikoff's reception suggests that his work could not, except for a few initiates, be understood in its own time; or if it was understood, beyond his few serious readers, it was understood in such a way to allow it to be discounted as superficial.

The paradox is that the difficulty of his work—which is related to its understatement and subtlety, its iconoclasm and Darkness, and the freshness and originality of his music—is of a different order than the more famous "obscurities" of Pound or Eliot or Joyce, difficulties that our present habits of reading tend to valorize more than they do the kind of difficulty the poems of Charles Reznikoff surely present.

The paradox is that Reznikoff's apparent accessibility stands in the way of a recognition of the significance of his poetic achievement: if he's liked for being "easy" then he's at the same time disregarded for being insignificant. But both these approaches seem not so much to read Reznikoff as to read through him.

44. In *Reading in Detail* Naomi Schor argues that working in detail has a history of being stigmatized as feminine, which is to say, of peripheral value. Unlike the "heroic" sweep and "grandeur" of hypotactic order, detail is marginalized as ornament, blemish, weakness, deficiency, simplicity, *easy:* ultimately as disregardable as the "lost" women and men that Reznikoff refuses to thematize or caricature or stereotype. Reznikoff never states his themes in generalized, abstract terms but leaves it for his particulars, so ordered, to speak for themselves.

45. To be sure, Reznikoff's stated intentions are for "clarity" of "communication" against the "cryptic"—but his insistence is on—*above all else*—"intensity" produced by "compression" and "rhythm" (Cut and shapeliness) that is "passionate" and "musical" and *not*—in *his* words—"flat."[59] Opacity, in this sense, is the refusal of the flatness of ocular or idealist imagism: it is the opacity of the object, of objectification; just as opacity is also the antithesis of the cryptic, with its "cloying music / the hints of what poets meant / and did not quite say,"[60] the symbolic assertion of a puzzle to be deciphered: words not ciphers but things of the world to be thickened, weighted, condensed, so that they may be heard and felt.

46. Then how to understand Reznikoff's choice of recurrent, dark subject matter in his work. . .or how to understand why so much violence, so much darkness in the world?

47. "When you least expect it the lights go out. & when you least expect it, too, the lights come back on again."—Reznikoff, during the Poetry Center reading.

48. Yet flesh is opaque: when you catch it (comprehend it), it's dead.

49. *Testimony* is perhaps the darkest, and certainly most unrelenting, of modernist long poems. Reznikoff spent years in various libraries pouring over trial records from the 1890s and 1900s, selecting a few cases out of each hundred he surveyed and then styling them so as to allow the event itself to speak, as if without interference, without teller. A chronicle of industrial accidents, domestic violence, racism, *Testimony* tells the story of America's forgotten, those who suffer without redress, without name, without hope; yet the soul of these States is found in books like this; the acknowledgment of these peripheral stories turns a waste land into holy ground.[61]

Reznikoff worked on *Testimony* through the 1930s and 1940s, at a time when both Oppen and Carl Rakosi had stopped writing, in part because of the conflict they felt between their left political commitments and their poetic commitments. Perhaps *Testimony* can be seen as a labor-intensive counterpart to the lacuna in these poets' work.

Reznikoff's work is preoccupied with those left out of society, people whose lives were destroyed by things (machines, circumstances, an economy) out of their control: again, the neglected, the overlooked. His one reference to Marx is placed strikingly as the last of four poems in a series about prophecy called "Jerusalem the Golden," which is itself the final series of his book of the same title, published, significantly, in 1934 (#79; I:127-129). "Jerusalem the Golden" begins with "The Lion of Judah"—a poem in which the prophet Nathan denies the right to permanent foundation even, or already, to the Jews ("you shall not build the Lord's house / because your hands have shed much blood"). This poem, considered in the light of the first poem of *Jerusalem the Golden* ("The Hebrew of your poets, Zion / is like oil upon a burn / . . .I have married . . .the speech of strangers") suggests the intractability of the Jewish diaspora (understood, however, not as exile but a series of displacements/replacements). In the second poem, "The Shield of David," the prophets locate "all the lights of heaven" in "the darkness of the grave," abjuring the emptiness of ritual as shells for "unseeing eyes," eyes that look but do not see: *looked and saw* the Light in the Darkness:

worship Me in righteousness;
worship me in kindness to the poor and weak,
in justice to the orphan, the widow, this stranger among you,
and in justice to him who takes hire in your hand

The third poem, a brief evocation of pantheism, is entitled "Spinoza," after the prototypical Jewish "excommunicate" or "non-Jewish Jew," in Isaac Deutcher's phrase, whose pantheism and determinism significantly prefigures historical materialism (both Marx and Spinoza are crucial sources for Zukofsky's *"A"*-9). In the last of the series, "Karl Marx," Reznikoff writes:

We shall arise while the stars are still shining. . .
to begin the work we delight in,
and no one shall tell us, Go. . .
to the shop or office you work in
to waste your life for a living. . .
there shall be bread and no one hunger for bread. . .
we shall call nothing mine—nothing for ourselves only. . .

50. Darkness and light; or dusk, when dark and light can no longer be separated—

Suddenly we noticed that we were in darkness;
so we went into the house and lit the lamp[62]

51. Thrown into the world through EVENT as TESTIMONY / TESTIMONY as EVENT, the poem merges the objective and subjective so that no polarizing can occur.

"Event" emerges as the world/word materializing process takes place.

52. *Testimony:* to found America means to find it—which means to acknowledge its roots in violence, to tell the lost stories because unless you find what is lost you can found nothing.

Against the indifference of the juridical gaze (paradigm of detachment), founding means giving witness to what is denied at the expense of the possibility of America.

In and about the house darkness lay, a black fog;
and each on his bed spoke to himself alone, making no sound

To speak out against the Dark is to make Light: this is the Poetic alchemy, call it economy, that Reznikoff enacts over and again: to recover the lost, make sound in the presence of silence, behold the Light—

53. *Testimony* as memorial: an act of grief/grieving, of mourning. The cost of life, the cost of lives lost is poetic/psychic economy, of which this an account/accounting. "No one to witness and adjust"—'cept *here.*

"Calling the lapsed Soul. . . / O Earth O Earth return."[63]

54. "Shipwreck of the singular"[64]: mourning/grief as part of the celebration of the New Year (Yom Kippur), as prerequisite for new world / new word. "America" not so much a "place" but an attitude toward language.

55. Ignored, like Stein, partly because he does not use symbological allusion or historical reference (Pound/Eliot) that require you to look elsewhere than to what is happening, Reznikoff makes the reader (not himself) into the witness of language, where events are enacted in words and we don't so much judge them as come near to them.

56. The observer and the observed meet at dusk in the midst of shadows. How can we tell the seeing from the seen, the see-er from the seer?

57. Reznikoff's Rosh Hashona poem ends this way:

> You have given us the strength
> to serve You,
> but we may serve or not
> as we please;
> not for peace nor for prosperity,
> not even for length of life, have we merited
> remembrance; remember us
> as the servants
> You have inherited. [65]

Jewishness not as "chosen" but *inherited:* can't get rid of. Jewishness in the sense of an inheriting possibility for poetry and its testimony as engaged witness that *changes*—intervenes in—what it witnesses by its care in & for the world/word.

III.[66]

January 1, 1990

Dear Jean-Paul Auxeméry,

At a party last night, for the Christian New Year, a guest brought our host, a Czechoslovakian-Jewish emigrè, a piece of the Berlin Wall. A piece of rubble, to be sure, but packaged in a brightly designed box assuring, with a red stamp, that papers attesting to the "authenticity" of the contents had been enclosed by the importers, a New Jersey firm. A small label on the top

indicated that the item had been purchased at Bloomingdale's. Here, indeed, was the essence of late, or multinational, capitalism: a commodity created, by the alchemy of packaging, from that which is intrinsically worthless. It's the sort of "symbolism" that is diametrically opposed by what you usefully call Charles Reznikoff's "ethics of style," which has at its method acknowledging the details of intrinsic value that this same culture has discarded, as by the reverse alchemy of turning things of substance into rubble by *disregard.*

I won't ever forget the first night, and first morning, of this year's Jewish New Year, where we celebrated the work of Reznikoff in a former Christian abbey at Royaumont, near Paris. I won't forget that our Reznikoff panel ended with your overwhelming reading of *Holocaust*—your French translation of a work barely known in its native land. My own intervention had focussed not only on Reznikoff's *Testimony*, as you note, but also more particularly on his *Complete Poems*. What I remember thinking was that *Holocaust* had never sounded so necessary, so appropriate (in your sense that Reznikoff always found the most "apropos" words).

Yes, I have had my difficulties with *Holocaust*—the most unrelentingly painful to read of Reznikoff's work, about the most unmitigated horror of our common, "modern" history. I think I must have said this work was about a problem *specifically* European; I could not have meant that it was "solely" European, however, since the destruction of the European Jews is of the most urgent relevance to all Americans, to all Jews, indeed to all humans. I think I must have suggested that *Holocaust* is necessarily Reznikoff's most problematic work at a technical—in the sense of aesthetic or formal—level, in the sense that no American work of poetry had found a form to adequately acknowledge that which is beyond adequate acknowledgment; so that *Holocaust* stands apart and beyond the achievement of Reznikoff's *Poems* and *Testimony*.

I say *specifically* European for a very practical, literal, reason that you, with your remarkable involvement with Olson, would certainly appreciate the implications of: Reznikoff's work, apart from *Holocaust*, and his Biblical poems and Talmudic "collages," has been a profound investigation of "American" materials: it is work immersed in the local and particular details of this place that he found himself in, first generation in his family, and also of a language, English, that was an intrinsic part of that emplacement. One of my favorite Reznikoff remarks is one he made to Marie Syrkin, his wife, in explaining why he would not go to Palestine with her in 1933; he told her "he had not yet explored Central Park to the full." Indeed Reznikoff never left the U.S. or English (an "American" English of course) in real life or in his poems—with the primary exception of *Holocaust*, which not only involved a European site or place *(lieu)* but also for the first time working with documentary materials not originally in English. For me, what was so striking about your reading of *Holocaust* in French was that one could

imagine those incidents happening near the place, even Royaumont; we were *close by* the *scene.*

Reznikoff's *Complete Poems* and *Testimony* explore the tragedy and violence that is the grounding of this Republic, call it United States. It is not a story that Americans are familiar with or, even now, ready to acknowledge. Each poem of Reznikoff, always placed in series, shocks by its recognition of something otherwise unstated or unsaid: say, unacknowledged or repressed or denied or suppressed. *Testimony*, while a litany of sorrows, finds new avenues to locate the transgression of dominance against the human spirit.

By contrast, the violence, the repulsiveness, of the incidents in *Holocaust* are always and already known, hence preclude the insinuating subtlety of *Testimony.* And, for Americans, always and already projected outward to the German, to the Nazi, to a European story. If it does not hit home, it is because the story of World War II has been the greatest source for American self-congratulation: we defeated the Nazi monsters. *NOT:* the Nazi monsters in us, which go on, largely on the loose. This is like saying, North America has not had a 20th-century war on its soil. Reznikoff shows otherwise. *The Complete Poems* and *Testimony* testify to a system of domination and disregard that has *won; Holocaust* to a system of explicit violence that, at least on the face, *lost.*

Poetry is always technical, an order of words, at least in the first instance. If I put aside, yes even disregard, the sentiment of "la raison d'un coeur noble" to reiterate these technical questions it is not without an appreciation of the integrity of the whole of Reznikoff's oeuvre or of the noble gesture of your bringing into French, into France, Reznikoff's final testament, a testament that, to be sure, does go beyond his concern for any one nation or language, a work that we can only wish he had never *had to* write.

With all best wishes,
Charles Bernstein

NOTES

1. *By the Well of the Living and Seeing* (1969), sec. I, poem #1, in *The Complete Poems of Charles Reznikoff. Vol. II,* ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1977), p. 91. Subsequent references to this volume are cited in the text.

   The story of the destruction of his grandfather's poetry is part of his mother's narrative in "Early History of a Seamstress" (1929) (published as part of Reznikoff's *Family Chronicle)* and is repeated in his 1930 novel *By the Waters of Manhattan,* whose first half recasts "Early History"—less successfully to my reading—into the third person, leaving the rest almost entirely unchanged. Reznikoff alludes to the burning of his grandfather's "bulky" manuscript again a few pages before the end of the novel.

2. *By the Well of Living and Seeing,* sec. III, "Early History of a Writer," #17 (excerpt); vol. II, p. 176.

3. These three works were brought together as *Family Chronicle*—a masterpiece of historical autobiography (a genre more commonly presented today as oral history). First published in England under this title by Norman Bailey & Co., it was published by Universe Books, New York, in 1971, with a perfunctory introduction by the Jewish chronicler and humorist Harry Golden.

4. "Charles Reznikoff: A Talk with L. S. Dembo" in *Charles Reznikoff: Man and Poet*, ed. Milton Hindus (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1984), p. 98.

5. "Early History of a Writer," #16 (excerpt); II:168-171.

6. Marie Syrkin, "Charles: A Memoir," in *Man and Poet*.

7. *By the Well of Living and Seeing*, sec. II, #33; II:136.

8. Thomas Frederick Sharp, *"Objectivists" 1927–1934: A Critical History of the Work and Association of Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff*; Stanford University Ph.D. dissertation, 1982 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1984), p. 21.

9. Sharp, p. 206. *Man and Poet* reprints the *Poetry* version of the essay, pp. 377-388.

10. Sharp, p. 505.

11. Marie Syrkin, "Charles: A Memoir" in *Man and Poet*, p. 45. See also Milton Hindus, "Introduction," in *Man and Poet*.

12. Charles Reznikoff, *The Manner Music*, with an introduction by Robert Creeley (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1977), p. 128. Prose versions of Reznikoff's poems can be found beginning on pp. 15, 19, 25, 27, 28, 58, 60, 77, and 115.

13. Quoted by Hindus in *Man and Poet*, pp. 31-32.

14. Syrkin, in *Man and Poet*, pp. 53-54.

15. *Inscriptions: 1944–1956*, #23 (excerpt); II:76. This poem is also quoted below in section 10. In the poetry center reading, Reznikoff called this poem, and #21, discussed below, his "platform as a writer of verse."

16. *Inscriptions*, #21 (excerpt); II:75.

17. "Aphrodite Vrania" in *Poems*, 1920, 25; I:36.

18. *Inscriptions*, #24; II:76.

19. *Inscriptions*, #23; II:76. The final stanza of this three-stanza poem is quoted immediately below.

20. Burton Hatlen, "Objectivism in Context: Charles Reznikoff and Jewish-American Modernism," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association, New York, 1992.

21. What makes the poems disjunctive is that they are not, in fact, threaded together by the use of such conjunctions as "meanwhile" and "at the same time," which smooth over the synaptic break between units, that allow for the syncopation of cubo-seriality. The use of such hinges as "meanwhile" is particularly favored by John Ashbery, a device that apparently makes the marvelous incongruities of his work appealing to some critics who

dislike the more textually disruptive practices described here. Note also that Biblical and Homeric parataxis, employs frequent conjunctions to link elements, a feature that distinguishes this older form of parataxis from modernist collage and montage. A fuller discussion of this issue would need to account for the structurally related use of parallelism in tribal poetries.

22. Joseph M. Conte, *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 20. Conte defines the form of the serial poem as "both discontinuous and capable of recombination." He notes that the discontinuity of the elements of the serial poem "—or their resistance to a determinate order—distinguishes the series from thematic continuity, narrative progression, or meditative insistence that often characterizes the sequence. . .The series demands neither summation nor exclusion. It is instead a combinative form whose arrangements admit a variegated set of materials." In contrast, the sequence relies on "mechanic or imposed organization," for example the temporal progression of the seasons (p. 21).

23. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), #501, vol. 2, pp. 384-85.

24. SUNY-Buffalo: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992.

25. In *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Peter Quartermain links the paratactic prosody of Zukofsky with Bunting and Pound and back to Whitman. See especially pp. 127-133. Conte makes the distinction between seriality and proceduralism: "Serial works are characterized by the discontinuity of their elements and the centrifugal force identified with an 'open' aesthetic. Procedural works, on the other hand, are typified by the recurrence of elements and a centripetal force that promises a self-sustaining momentum" (p. 42).

26. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and *Zettel* exemplify the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic order. *Zettel* is made up of over 700 slips found together in a file box. These slips were mostly cut from extensive typescripts of Wittgenstein's and many of the fragments were subsequently reworked. In addition, it appears that some of the remarks were written originally as part of this series. The editors remark that "now we know that his method of composition was in part to make an arrangement of such short, almost independent, pieces. . ." For our investigation here, it is striking that some of the sections of *Zettel* were cut out of "one or two total rearrangements of *Investigations* and other material"; the fact that Wittgenstein made such recombinations underscores the serial nature of his major philosophical work. See the "Editor's Preface" of *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.—Serial forms are particularly valuable for both philosophy and criticism, despite the fact that they are almost never employed.

27. *Poems* (1920), #5, in *The Complete Poems of Charles Reznikoff, Vol. I*, ed. Seamus Cooney (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), p. 29. Subsequent references to this volume are cited in the text.

28. Linda Simon provides these quotes in a useful synopsis of the responses to Reznikoff in her "Annotated Bibliography of Works About Charles Reznikoff" in *Man and Poet*, pp. 411-40.

    Milton Hindus's laudatory review of *Family Chronicles* is representative of the "giving up the baby with bathwater" or "weak" response to Reznikoff's detractors, even though Hindus is not here talking about the poems (*Man and Poet*, p. 426): The work is difficult, Hindus argues, not because of the presence of avant-garde defamiliarizing

devices "but because of its seemingly absolute and artless and primitive simplicity. . .He studiously and purposefully *flattens*.. every incident. . .Reznikoff consistently subdues all the highlights in his pictures and produces a monochromatic effect which demands the utmost effort and attention from the reader." One wants to immediately add here what Jerome Rothenberg wrote of tribal primitivism: *primitive means complex.* Still, it's the picture of Reznikoff as "artless and unassuming," as Carl Rakosi describes him *(Man and Poet,* p. 429), that underplays how very artful and assuming this work is.

29. "First, there is the Need," in *Sparrow 52* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, January 1977, p. 6 (unpaginated).

30. *Man and Poet,* p. 22.

31. "First, there is the Need," p. 2.

32. *Inscriptions,* #21 (excerpt); II:75. In the Poetry Center reading, Reznikoff calls this poem, and #23; his "platform as a writer of verse"; 21 is also cited in section 2, and section 31.

33. Gershom Scholem, in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961) notes that "the doctrine of God's immanence in all things" has earlier roots "among the great Jewish mystics and Kabalists. To me, not the doctrine seems new, but rather the primitive enthusiasm with which it was expounded and the truly pantheistic exhilaration evoked by the belief that God surrounds everything and pervades everything," pp. 347-48. Subsequently referred to in the text.

34. "Te Deum" (excerpt), #22 of *Inscriptions,* II:75.

35. Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems: 1947–1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 134.

36. *By the Well of Living and Seeing,* sec. II, #19 (excerpt); II:121.

37. *Inscriptions,* #20; II:75. This is the sense of paradise I hear in Ron Silliman's *Paradise* and Lyn Hejinian's *The Guard.*

38. These are the last words in Sarah Reznikoff's "Early History of a Seamstress," *Family Chronicle,* p. 99.

39. "Notes on the Spring Holidays," #III, *Inscriptions,* #46; II:84.

40. "A Talk with L.S. Dembo" in *Man & Poet.* 107; italics added. Subsequently referred to in the text.

41. *Jerusalem the Golden* (1934), #17; I:111.

42. *Jerusalem the Golden,* #39; I:115.

43. *Five Groups of Verse* (1927), #14; I:72.

44. *Jerusalem the Golden,* #1; I:107. In the Dembo interview, Reznikoff responds to a question about "a personal sense of isolation or exile" in this poem:

> I don't think 'isolation' is the word. I don't feel isolated in English it's just that I'm missing a lot not knowing Hebrew. Incidentally, Havelock Ellis, in one of his books, as I remember it, points out the tendency in a writer to use characteristics of the speech of his ancestors, even a speech he no longer knows (p. 104).

45. *Inscriptions*, #21; II:75. Reznikoff's "platform."

46. In "On Reznikoff and 'Talking Hebrew'" (*Sagetrieb* 7:2, 1988), John Martone writes that "Central to Reznikoff's objectivism is the poet's subordination of the self to the material at hand. The poetic subject and not the poet as subject is the center of the work. The sincerity, Zukofsky said about Reznikoff's work, is in the details. And *all* Reznikoff's books. . .direct our attention not so much to an experiencing authorial self as to a detailed, profoundly historical world of experience. Reznikoff is the first American poet to 'decenter' the subject on so massive a scale. . .Revolutionary in the context of American poetry, [this decentering] is a basic feature of the *Talmud* and a given in traditional Jewish hermeneutics" (p. 72).

47. "Autobiography: New York," sec. 2 of *Going To and Fro and Walking Up and Down* (1941), #IV; II:27.

48. "Autobiography: Hollywood," sec. 3 of *Going To and Fro and Walking Up and Down*, #XXIV (excerpt); II:46; italics added.

49. #XXIV immediately following the adjacent poem; italics added.

50. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, #1695, vol. 3, p. 1149.

51. George Oppen, "Of Being Numerous," #1 (excerpt), in *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1975), p. 147.

52. "Autobiography: Hollywood," #III (excerpt), II:39. Compare Oppen's "And the pure joy / Of the mineral fact // Tho it is impenetrable // As the world, if it is matter / is impenetrable" "Of Being Numerous," #2, p. 148.

53. "Early History of a Writer," #17; II:172. Reznikoff mentions this anecdote, identifying Kittredge's Shakespeare course at Harvard, which is not mentioned in the poem, in the Dembo interview, *Man and Poet*, p. 103.

54. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, #155, p. 28e.

55. "Between Walls" in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 453: what shines in this poem is "the broken": that which is damaged or destroyed & that which has been cast aside, but, at the same time, the fragment, the shard of ineffable worth. "Actual Word Stuff, Not Thoughts for Thoughts" is the title of Quartermain's essay on Williams and Zukofsky in *Disjunctive Poetics*; the quote is from a 1928 letter from Williams to Zukofsky. —One might imagine Stein's project as a radical extension of seriality to the level of syntax, so that not only sentences or phrases or details, but also individual words, are permuted.

56. *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, Macmillan, 1958), #89.

57. *Man and Poet*, p. 428.

58. Pointlessness is a typical charge made against radical modernist discontinuity and fragmentation. Thus, Reznikoff's poems are "essentially insignificant" and "incidental and decorative" according to a 1934 review; while Hayden Carruth, reviewing *Testimony*, speaks of Reznikoff's "cold, neutral language" as "uninteresting" and "lifeless" and Robert Alter refers to the "seeming impassivity. . .flatness, and numbing pointlessness" of different Reznikoff works. See Linda Simon's "Annotated Bibliography" in *Man and Poet*. In contrast, John Martone, in "On Reznikoff and 'Talking Hebrew'" is

right when he calls *Testimony* "the most difficult of the modernist long poems. . .No grandiose mythopoetic vision distracts us from the commonplace, from the [often brutal] circumstances of everyday life" (p. 79).

59. In *First, there is the Need*, Reznikoff writes, "Clarity, precision, order, but the answer is intensity: with intensity we have compression, rhythm, maybe rhyme, maybe alliteration. The words move out of prose into verse as the speech becomes passionate and musical instead of flat" (p. 5). Reznikoff also talks about prose not having the "intensity that I wanted" in #17 of "Early History of a Writer" (II:171).

60. "Early History of a Writer" #16; II:169.

61. My own reading of Reznikoff began with *Testimony* which for some time overshadowed my reading of his other poems. I see these remarks as a commentary on how to approach, how to interpret, Reznikoff's great anti-epic. The best account of the composition of *Testimony* is Katherine Shevelow's "History and Objectification in Charles Reznikoff's Documentary Poems, *Testimony* and *Holocaust*" in *Sagetrieb* I:2 (1982).

62. *Poems* (1920), #22 (excerpt); I:35. The citation in the next section is the last stanza of this poem.

63. Williams's *Spring and All*, XVII ("To Elsie"), *Collected*, p. 217 and Blake's "Introduction" to his indelible series, "Songs of Experience."

64. Oppen, "Of Being Numerous" #7 (excerpt), p. 151.

65. "New Year's," #I in "Meditations on the Fall and Winter Holidays," sec. 13 of *Inscriptions;* II:66.

66. This letter was originally published, in a translation by Jean-Paul Auxemery, in *a.b.s.: poètes à royaumont* no. 3 (1990) along with Auxemery's original letter to me.

GEORGE OPPEN ON REZNIKOFF

George Oppen introduced Charles Reznikoff at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State on March 21, 1974. The transcript of that introduction, made by Pierre Alferi, is published here for the first time, with the kind permission of the estate of George Oppen. Copyright© 1993 by Lynda Oppen Mourelatos. Thanks to the American Poetry Archive of the Poetry Center for providing a copy of the tape.—CB.

OPPEN: That poem of Charles's that begins "As I, barbarian, at last, although slowly, could read Greek/ at 'blue-eyed Athena. . .'"and it goes on, is Charles' reading of that lithograph portrait on the wall of Athena. Just take that poem, it's a beautiful poem, with a great cadence, and it moves on into that strange feeling of visiting famous times and famous places, in the midst of one's own affairs through books. There doesn't seem any reason. . .That poem was written at least 40 years ago, since I read it 40 years ago. I'm complaining about the length of time it has taken to notice Charles Reznikoff. Not that Charles Reznikoff so far as I know cares. The last time I tried to praise Charles to himself he at once interrupted to say "George, I'm sure we both do the best we can." A difficult man to praise, and this is my opportunity. And all the same that isn't just random eccentricity on Rezzi's part, and if it was modesty, it was modesty of extraordinary force. Rezzi wouldn't listen to praise because he intended to disregard condemnation, and this was. . .Some of his poems in the *Collected* were written in 1918, some of them earlier, I think. There was the issue of free verse, to begin with, and of course Reznikoff couldn't make use of the Whitmanesque breadth of the Midwest poets, and he didn't have the authorization of the New England scenes. These were poems of the city. Instead, a small man starts to climb the stairs out of the subway, and he sees the moon shining through the entrance, whereupon the world stops, and is illumined. Poem after poem of the city, which is experienced as the narrow end of the funnel: there's poems of the metaphysical dimension, actually; the "metaphysical dimension" being the absence of terror, or the disregard of it down to the very chewing gum stuck to the pavement which is in that poem . . .The proofs in these poems are images, and the images are proofs, and

proofs are overwhelming. But Rezzi, who didn't permit praise and disregarded condemnation or neglect, had bought a letterpress, every evening after work he set two lines of verse, teaching himself to set type as he worked. . .at it, and this way he printed all of his first books by himself. We, Mary and I that is, have carried these poems in our minds through everything that has happened to us since we were 19 or 20 years old. I don't know of any poems more pure, or more purely spoken, or more revelatory. As I've confessed before, I think the young of my generation were luckier than the youngest in this audience, in that we had to go searching for our own tradition and our own poets. What we found was Reznikoff and he's played—I cannot say how important he has been to us, and I think he will be to you, and this is what I wanted to say to Charles Reznikoff when he said, "George, I think we all do the best we can."

REZNIKOFF: If I'm not loud enough, tell me, I'll try to be louder. To begin with, I thank you very much, George, for your introduction, except that it embarrasses me, now I have to deliver. If you had been very hostile, I think it would have been stimulating. Thanks, anyway!

I think I'll begin in a way I usually do, with my platform, to use a political expression, my platform as a writer of verse:

[Reads "Salmon and red wine" from *Inscription;* II:76.] That's one. And now I'll read you another:

[Reads "I have neither the time, nor the weaving skill, perhaps"; II:75.] That's the platform! [applause]

—Please don't applaud! Because I won't be able to say all I want to say, and that'll stop me! Well, anyway, let's go on from here. I—of course most of the poetry of the last century, and of this century too, has been properly called "nature poetry." And the last great poet was Robert Frost, in that class. But for those of us born in the cities—at least I was—and lived there all our lives—well, that's a very appropriate comment, but I'll have to wait a while . . .[sound and lights go out]. . . When you least expect it the lights go out and when you least expect it, too, the lights go on. That's life, urban life anyway. Well. I was going to say, for those of us born in cities, there's a kind of verse which we might call city verse. I'll go ahead with some of the city verse, anyway.

DRAFT 15: TITLE

It was the erect nipple centered
in wax,
the simulacrum nipple matched in wax entitle,
was the dislodged
NIPPLE staring out
the opaque cover of a LEDGER
said or set straight, but sealed
to the wall
with bolts and clamps, thus
riveting.

Yet time is cast off, cast
forth. Fleeting
beyond one's wildest dreams
the arc of a cigarette butt flicked
out of the moving car in front of mine.
Even the loss is lost.
"I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar."

An armada of days taken afloat,
patient, kicking, counting the simple strokes
up and down the pool,
but the whole
unaccountable;
even into extended
telling, consumed.
The whole notion of eating,
eating, eating everything, to get

to the one thing
that is revealed, an

avatar of
the poem, which began by being
organized loosely but
here concerns blood creatures.
Avaler, the word to say,
gorge on the body of the dead.

Each ledger
small shutter
scenes a kind of snap-shut
shot with 4 black corners, and the faces
so small, too small,
unrealizable, that one could, so far as
memoir (or saying anything)
goes, say
the same things over and over
various ways;

anyway
"blurred and breathless,"
the mottle surface of a mortal body
wastes away.

The sparking arc of a smoked-to-the-filter butt.
The careful kick, stroke, breathe of the crawl.
Silences of water.
Cranky bile
bolted to the wall.

A little variety, please,
muthoplokon!
so one may be thrown,
wrestled
to the ground limb over limb and,
by the muthe-plucker,
knotted in holds
over and beyond.

In the panic over the missing codine, and how,
from that motel, a final short trip
to the middle of nowhere,
could scare up
a prescription of such densities and extensives
that perk and succor
the failing one-breasted body,
a sugar tit of honey suck
one gives the dying—who
could be called?
who, called, could credit
the accident of forgetting.

Just actions, and inadequate summaries:
opening a sealed grim house,
one person in a shallow entry,
that smoky smell of an old motel,
"cottage," "pottage," dank, dark, mildewed.

Yet all that got uttered was
what yard sale and whence
those unfamiliar relics
out of other families' tents—
the flowered butter dish just
slightly cracked,
ancient cameras leaking light—

emerge into unreckonable clutter
at the opening of our tomb.

And "here" the dead with gabble and gargle
pluck sinews one by one, and twist
the terrible tendons to tune
that thrown and fallen pile of flesh
taut as a lyre.

Something will be coming,
some rare sound.
The oldest instruments.

But who could credit
such scream, such stream
unsweetened,
thick with unspoken
and unspeakable chords
in the sweet milk of light.

So avaler sa langue, is the expression.
Eat up, swallow, stifle the tongue.
Kashe und shayle.
Questions, more questions,
phantom and evanescent wisps
that evaporate, as if
ashen syllables of Yiddish.

Remember, remember,
remember nothing, but more
than you want to
because following the thread of any one slide
entangles labyrinths

requiring
the rest of your born days
to eviscerate.

A cigarette butt smoking arc'd out a car window,
driver's side puff on the asphalt a series
of dots and disconnections
fire sparks run over
by the next car, the wheels
that ran over the cigarette
of the previous smoker; and the dark car running behind
over the sparky flare
sees it, rolling down the road a little gust,
and then extinguished. Nothing more to find.
Except maybe the unquenchable filter, the threads,
neo-asbestos or polyester,
that catch and muffle, and, finally, fray
in the dump ditch
at the edge of the roadway.

Y'know the way the cello is so vibrant, and the piano too,
densities and sonorities that pitch past us
playing hard ball? a shower of desultory fire?

So imagine taking that wood and
slamming it: bam.
Col legno.
What composers in their demonic sweetness
call "extended techniques."

Well, "bam bam bam"
the fist chops the page.
The sound is hardly as convincing
as slugging the cello, gets only a little
rattle, but the gesture————————

poetry, schmoetry, it's
dark spurts—it's
words cooked in their own ink:
in su tinta,
which in the creature's blood.

I fall to the tarmac,
filled to the sick.

Given the wrestled
tentacles tendered for food,
given this sauce,
what meat am I eating?
what dark blood letting?
Why this remembering
and that forgetting?
What rears and spurts and thickens
in the fosse?

———

Now that I'm here, I'm here.
I'd recognize this place anywhere.

November 1991–December 1992

The fourteen ledger books with nipples hung on the wall, by Dorothy Cross, from an installation called "Power House," Institute of Contemporary Arts, Philadelphia, 1991, consisting in part of 14 Logbooks, Cast Wax, Steel Bolts. "I am bourne. . .": Shelley's "Adonais." "Blurred and breathless," citation from *The Odyssey*, Book Eleven as translated by Robert Fitzgerald. Muthoplokon: the word by Sappho. The translation "myth plucker" from a poem of Ben Friedlander helped me on the way.

DRAFT 16: LITTLE

More than that is hard to say.
I am drawing a blank.

High clouds, their errancy, ply over ply,
    float.
    And still
I float on eddies in a rocking enormity.

Not mourning, not pleasure,
but auras of evanescence,
and nickname-painted train stops,
and jerry-built victrolas,
canoes pulling away sloppily from simple docks
dribble and bonk of paddle,
a particular grab of grasses,
hairy stems of weeds,
and the afikomen so well hidden
plus misunderstood
it was never teased forth.
Never then redeemed.

So I saw what I saw,
like photographs of the war,
stripes under wire,
shadows scummed or smudged on pavement,
and starved locked rows.

Some clocks stopped but not
other clocks, tick and tock and
I was part of all that it,
a lucky nothing
not in the way of particular harm,
half witness half witless
    —dot—a little
    yod or yid

amid the clamors of dawn,
waking inside the whiteness,
before anything is given——
that is, taken.

To this magic table
covered with glistening nap,
a place like a fairy tale: dolorous and lyric,
"un couvert" where the bread is perfect,
dishes, bodies, fruit piled,
cute mugs caffeine-coated,
wine in dregs and lees,
and salty bowls of weeds,
there is someone, step, step:

over the bridge, down the field,
under the fence, through the door,
and speaks.
The order is "Take cover!"
And hands to necks
the cowering shapes
wedge under desks
puppets of puppets.

Wherein at play
the smallest chancy jot of scratched substance
bounces along a pebbly day.

Recently I lost my watch
dropped straight down off my wrist
and fell into a hole so far it wasn't there.
Strange,
that litmus wristlet π
had covered my nakedness
and now I was exposed.
Or dreamed I'd "missed my stop."

From that point, those points, on,
the trace or shard, the thing

come passing darkly cross me
in the tunnel dirt of time
was mine.

Not hero, not polis, not story, but it.
        It multiplied.
        It engulfing.
        It excessive.
"It" like X that marks the spot, that is, the spots,
an ever wily while, a wilderness of hope.
The spot of almost hopeless hope.
Can barely credit it.

Thus my voice is empty, but I speak and sing
only of this.
The undersentences
that rise, tides of sediment, the little
stuff agglutinating in time, debris
        I sing.
        Cano,
cannot not do it so.

In time's deep well,
my shallow heart has flooded.

From the exile woods
on the edge of the edge
a little mite doth blow.
A Mite! I might
have killed such mites and bits
        before
        today
I didn't think

of needing such
a Little Mite,
this dusty road.

May 1992-December 1992

DRAFT 17: UNNAMED

It's true that every ending only erases the board
rather than filling it.
The poems are written in strange chalk
strange, a chalk
in some lights dark, plump with serifs
on a scumbled, agitated whiteness,
but mainly a white chalk on a whiter page.

Which can hardly be read
and that, only under angled light.

As wide as my life though when you look again it's
a scroll narrow, but fast,
paper towels in the hands of a toddler,
down and up hillocks and rises,
blazes and falls
so fast one can only
trail after it. "what could be more natural."

Or dark as a mist
hanging over the fill-built airport,
smoke brown the sky looks daubed
and of no depth.

But the chalk (with luck, another turn) turns
translucent, light on light
which is, in certain lights, like dark on dark
but more
blinding.

Words,
scattered falling
arcs of shame,
glaze the flicker-ridden labyrinth—

it makes a peculiar medium.
And its cross-grained nourishment
demands a strange tooth.

Perhaps translucence is a quality of erasure.
The thing anyway looks like a Cy Twombly
strokes trailing each other and dibs, nibs,
flicks of the wrist and a dreamy evisceration of pencil.
A morning glory bolted across the door.
My little valise is filled with souvenirs.
And none of them is "art."
I can see why he said I wasn't interested in art.

"Poetry depersonalizes 'days'
in language." It sounded
as if this were what I wanted

yet the hole, the sufferance
fell open. Heard the shaped scream of a duration.
Three times: the game, the same, the same again,
"nothing but these facts and all these facts."
Why did he think I "wasn't interested in art"?

Low song clouds in unbelonging places
emphasize the activities of light,
which is unspeakable.

Also the sound, not just the light,
plays along certain vectors
pools in the force field

large, square, rent, timeless
void. Know?
Can barely know what labyrinth.

The grass clods push up
between the lines and cracks
of pavement. In the depth

of night, a street lamp
looming behind them
they rise and lurk,

turf tufts made near twice
their "real" size
by shadow.

But what I mean is this.
She stood at the pit
where, this 50 years,

155 Jews were shot.
There, near a field of rye,
she'd found dozens of notes and addresses

tossed away
moments before their deaths.
To this day,

she regrets
that, out of fear
she did not pick them up.

The poetics seems plain.
Since then
there are many people spend their time

picking up the notes.
But they are not there.
They are as gone as possible to be.

So the gathering
is impossible.
But still the shapes are bowed,

and search
this otherwhere of here.
Yet had they actually

been there
that time
being remembered,

it is equally possible
they too would have left
all of them where they lay.

What illusion, what delusion, what disillusion
writes these gaps?
tries these missing bits and scraps?

It is not elegy
though elegy seems the nearest category of genre
raising stars, strewing flowers. . . .

It's not that I have not
done this, in life or wherever I
needed to

or throwing out the curled tough leather
of' the dead
the cracked insteps of unwalkable shoes,

but it is not the name or term
for what is meant
by this inexorable bending.

And it is not "the Jews"
(though of course it's the Jews),
but Jews as an iterated sign of this site.

Words with (to all intents and purposes)
no before and after
hanging in a void of loss
the slow and normal whirlwind

from which it roars
they had not ever meant to be so lost,
so little wordth.

There are plenty of reasons to wonder.
Forlorn spirits with spinning "swords of flame"
as much like angels
as it's possible to be, but without
choices or pleasure,
stand empty.
Wavy wheaty heads
dart and sway;
contradictory rages swivel them.
But (pace Rilke) we can tell
these angels, or their similacra
"things."
Late busses, glass smash, styrofoam containers.
Low sun plain wing
grey toyota
ormolu
soccer freshener
kith, soot, food
rainbows of oil.

The intersection
by Dunkin' Donuts,
"KFC," "TCBY,"
Gulf is
where you have to turn

coming
here.

So speak, stutterer, and stain the light with figments.
Rush, and brush, this evanescent shimmer
that does not even track

that does not
even fill or replicate
the historical air clotted here.

And Here
where all this is and are
this back and forth through time,

Alight.
It's never
what you think.

May-December 1992

The citation from Bakhtin ("poetry depersonalizes 'days'. . .") is from "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination,* 291. The line about "facts" is Michel Leiris, *Manhood.* The long citation, slightly modified from a news article headlined "Lithuanians haunted by Holocaust," was written by *Philadelphia Inquirer* staff writer Fen Montaigne, and appeared July 27, 1992, on the front page. Memories of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* persist, here the ninth.

DRAFT 18: TRADUCTION

Pas tout à fait cela.
Not quite it?
It's not exactly tha*t*

that A
our edge of it
billows before us.

useless, cannot quite grasp. . .

be litt*le* spot, be draft of
*ch*anges,
litmus ribbons
strips blowing, situés
roses et bleus
flicker. . .

face aux grands enjeux du siècle.

B
Something: an extract or essence of something
*el*se; this work pressed onto itself
enfolded imprint,
sleep-writing on a blanketed body. . .

Words stranger even to themselves
than cryptograms, like le
or it, ce/ça or see/saw,
always with an inside out, an outside in,
a sound, a toss,
et la Syntaxe étrange, d'étrangère

to suggest shades

of the unspeakable

Iota. These fragments "conspicuous

oracles"

cast off on the silence. . .

C—a task
assuming an exile
of, and in, the world
Writing defined as
seeing or being
between, even in one's
owned language it's translation,
not of text, but of
interstices, blank or overlooked, rough
muddy spots which dogs pee up
this common tuft or
that a black comb was pressed down into asphalt
when all this was repaved,
odd corner

if not translation
writing as foreign
from the very first. . . .

Finally, D
under the quiet umbra
of the midnight sky a-wait.

The shadow waxing
wonderful to watch,
at once so slow and fast
across the moon.

It's that I was looking at time
impatiently. Type A.
Taxed by waiting.
Yet hoping any moment will

speed only accelerates
that whole which goes this fast
and faster
still, this speck of life. . . .

The dark shape of what
we're living on
passes over,
I see what I have never seen

Galactal smudge.
It's earth.
It's where we are. So simple.
I can hardly understand

one single thing
of what this means.

Ainsi A, B, C, D etc.
se lancent
leurs questions de traduction
silencieuses:

A is for A.
Each thorn and eth,
wirds
you've never seen befor
weirds,

Grandes ampoules
de plastique
à moité flottant dans les eaux mortes des canaux
objets d'ard, comme a dit Duchamp,
are swamped.

Chestnuts, gravel, chestnuts
semés parmi les cailloux, impossible

pleasures, crushed.
C'est marron.
C'est génial.

All these words have to go
into another language; toute proportion gardée,

where does it mean they "go"?

Go somewhere, that is all.
Go somewhere
round the dusky dome of time.
Passing over each other, eclipsing light with dark
and dark shimmering with strangeness
so we look, as never be
fore, at what wag
always there—
the inside out of space.

And then come back
doubled,
having eaten different kinds of fat,
snuffled different kinds of mist
swaying, saying

"—it's lost in translation,
it's found in translation, and
translation's lost in me—
—nowhere here, never there—
both and both, nor nothing more,
longside myself in 'poetry'"—

a willy-silly sing-song song
for words to sing.

B. Pullulating surges:
scripsi o so
curious and fine.

Ligne de blanc.

Ligne de noir.

League of blank and nor.

Tinier, thicker, denser
than spider webs' wet silver,
blanks and nor—
the text
expressing

un silence, réseau intraduisible
comme du tissu,

dans lequel quelques JE et EUX
se trouvent piégés—
and these
glossalalic trembling wings
snagged in webs of quiet
proposent le spectacle
sons-et-mots sur un principe
et un seul:
ne pas déséquilibrer
rempli/vide
ici/là
ou bien iota/yod.

Effectuant un jeu quelconque
where words (mots) bubble, where something
(mut, matte, moot) the mud ferements, and
gets to be another word, mote.

Mote speaking.
Mote spoken.
Bubbles, syllables, galaxies
of babble.

C that C.
En ce temps-là je mordais la langue
quand je rêvais.
Ella est plus large maintenant
que ma bouche.
There are edges and sides
Endges and -cides
it now has it never
had before, it seems

never to have been so large
as now,

swollen, tender, tendus, swilling

LA LANGUE

hard to articulate, slower, but faster
than ever before j'ai passé ces jours
dans une tempête

de petits mots crépitants dont
les expressions ondeuses se font,
auprès desquelles on trouve
au vers
an bon blanc, des vers
qui hurlent
an fond d'un couloir gothique
où des hirondelles en ogive
se nichent juste an croisement
de chaque arc.

I am a black shape moving forward
merging with a black shape
cast like a die upon the stone.

Lettres, j'entre
dans le passage
des astres d'une langue
à une autre,
et de l'autre
à l'outre.

D.
All these languages?
I'm just translating time.

Sont des pages noires
avec sidereal speck
a work in hardly any language.
Not of the word, but of the gap.
An experience we are said to have
and the shadow
of experience we never have.
Multiple approximations
of more unstructured, wicked problems.

It's time, like a path,
littered with the evidence
of nomadic occupation,
these burnished vagaries of use
that I'm after.

I'm after everything, and after nothing.
A belatedness so strong
I come,

even after what is
not there,

after eradication
Who inhabits one's own time

who can be witness
after the eclipse of witness

cannot not speak. O poetry
—again and again no more poetry.

Nothing
is extensive enough
for this level of abandon-
ment,
éminemment macaronique ou
marconique, wire-less towers
on a windy shore
transmitting micro-shifts of sound and state-
ment cross a space we do not understand.

"traduire, c'est le contraire"
"de quoi?"

October 1992-January 1993

This poem arose from my being translated into French by a group including Emmanuel Hocquard, Yves di Manno, Jean-Paul Auxeméry, Joseph Guglielmi, Françoise de Larocque, and Joey Simas, as well as Marcel Cohen, Esther Tellerman, and others, at the Fondation Royaumont in October 1992. The first line was delivered to us by MM. Antoine Ségovia and Philippe Mairesse to provoke any one realization of the(ir) conceptual art piece "par le Menu"—"oeuvre dont les acquisitions et les présentations successives *modifient* la forme." The line "face aux grands enjeux du siècle" is from a review by Yves di Manno of Eliot Weinberger. Fragments as "conspicuous oracles" is Sollers on Mallarmé. "More unstructured, wicked problems" is a citation from John Nosek of Temple University's Computer and Information Sciences. With thanks to Micheline Rice-Maximin, Swarthmore College, for checking my French.

JAMES CLIFFORD
WHITE ETHNICITY

Entering Flaming Gorge, we quickly run through it on a swift current, and emerge into a little park. Half a mile below, the river wheels sharply to the left, and we turn into another canyon cut into the mountain. We enter the narrow passage. On either side, the walls rapidly increase in altitude. On the left are overhanging ledges and cliffs five hundred—a thousand—fifteen hundred feet high.*

He entered the IRT 7th Ave. subway at West 116th street (Columbia University) and headed downtown on the local. Uptown would take him to 125th Street (Harlem) and to unknown parts of the upper West Side. First stop downtown: 110th Street (OK to get out, and walk uptown or west); next 103rd Street (not OK to get out); then 96th Street (change for the express). The downtown express to Brooklyn rumbled into the station from Harlem. The passengers of the two subways mixed quickly. Express stops, downtown: 72nd Street (with its narrow platforms and stairs), 42nd (screeching wheels on the many switches, mobs of people pushing at the doors), 34th, Pennsylvania station (entry and exit of suitcases), 14th (get off here, or take the local, one stop to Sheridan Square). He pushed against a heavy revolving gate and climbed out into "The Village."

We trudged up the hill past the Stardust Lounge, Micky's Hair-styling—Hot and Cold Press, the Harlem Bop Lounge, the Dream Café, The Freedom Barber Shop, and the Optimo Cigar Shop which seemed to decorate every important street corner of those years. There was the Aunt May Eat Shoppe, and Sadie's Ladies and Children's Wear. There was Lum's Chop Suey Bar, and the Shiloh Baptist Mission Church painted white with colored storefront windows, the Record store with its big radio chained outside setting a beat to the warming morning sidewalk. And on the corner of Seventh Avenue as we waited for the green light arm in arm, the yeasty and

*John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. (1875) 1957.

suggestively mysterious smell issuing from the cool dark beyond the swinging half-doors of the Noon Saloon.**

In Greenwich Village he discovered folk music, and the Left. There was Gerde's Folk City and the Village Gate. There were scratchy folkways records of Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Pete Seeger, Vanguard recordings of Odetta, Joan Baez. In the 8th Street bookstore: Genet, Sartre, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Albee: "The Theatre of the Absurd." And every Sunday he unpacked a long-neck banjo at the fountain in Washington Square: "This Little Light of Mine," "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" "Ain't Gonna Study War No More." He was a folkie. First (a dark secret) came the Kingston Trio, then Joan Baez and The Weavers. A sequence of Seegers (Pete, Peggy, Penny, and Mike) led him to old time country music and, inexorably it seemed, to bluegrass. He went into the subway at 116th Street and travelled, a hundred blocks south, to Kentucky.

We take with us rations deemed sufficient to last ten months; for we expect, when winter comes on and the river is filled with ice, to lie over at some point until spring arrives; so we take with us abundant supplies of clothing. We have also a large quantity of ammunition and two or three dozen traps. For the purpose of building cabins, repairing boats, and meeting other exigencies, we are supplied with axes, hammers, saws, augurs, and other tools, and a quantity of nails and screws. For scientific work, we have two sextants, four chronometers, a number of barometers, thermometers, compasses, and other instruments.*

We talked about leaving New York, about homesteading somewhere in the west where a Black woman and a white woman could live together in peace. Muriel's dream was to live on a farm and it felt like a good life to me. I borrowed pamphlets from the library, and we wrote to all the appropriate government offices to find out if there were any homestead lands still available anywhere in the continental United States.**

On his way home from Greenwich Village (and often, from School) he passed through 96th Street station, uptown platform. Here the 7th Ave. local and express trains diverged. The local continued to the Columbia University stop on Morningside Heights. The express veered off. Visitors from downtown had to be warned. If you make a mistake you'll emerge at the "wrong 116th Street." He was always troubled by the existence of another station with that number, across Morningside Park in the danger-

**Andre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY, 1992.

ous, off-limits world he never saw called Harlem. He recalled once (or was it fantasy?) forgetting to leave the express at 96th and getting off where everyone and everything, including the "116" set in tiles on each pillar (exactly like "our stop"), was unfamiliar. Eyes down, he hurried to the opposite platform and waited, exposed in his whiteness, for the train back. Later he recognized 96th Street in the film, "Brother from Another Planet." The subway pulls into a station and a white kid tells the black alien that he is going to perform a magic trick. "I'm going to make all the white people disappear!" The doors open and all the whites exit, including the magician who waves good-bye as the doors of the Harlem express close.

American racism was a new and crushing reality that my parents had to deal with every day of their lives once they came to this country. They handled it as a private woe. My mother and father believed that they could best protect their children from the realities of race in America and the fact of American racism by never giving them a name, much less discussing their nature. We were told we must never trust white people, but *why* was never explained, nor the nature of their ill will. Like so many other vital pieces of information in my childhood, I was supposed to know without being told.**

On weekdays, when he was old enough, he took the subway or the Amsterdam bus downtown to school. He enjoyed the independence; and on the way home he would linger with his best friend, Chung, stopping on Broadway for a slice of Pizza. But he always walked the two blocks around school, Amsterdam and 94th Street, quickly. In Spring and Fall people were visible at the brownstones' open windows, or out on the stoops, talking, laughing, arguing—looking him over. There was a smell of garbage, and of pungent cooking. In winter the sidewalks were treacherous. He had to watch for snowballs. Spanish voices: "Mira! Mira!" (He heard "Meeda! Meeda!". . .and didn't look up.) His only wish was to get through the two blocks without attracting attention. Were they talking to him? Did he hear the Caribbean music that would later become so interesting? He heard no music at all. Each morning the school doors closed behind him; it was quiet inside. He read at old tables among plants in brass pots.

I sat on the floor with my back against the wooden cabinet radio, *The Blue Fairy Book* on my lap. I loved to read and listen to the radio at the same time, feeling the vibrations of sound through my back like an activating background to the pictures that streamed through my head, spun by the fairy tales. I looked up, momentarily confused and disoriented as I usually was when I stopped reading suddenly. Had the trolls really attacked a harbor where some hidden treasure of pearls was buried?**

The river is very deep, the canyon very narrow, and still obstructed, so that there is no steady flow of the stream; but the waters wheel, and roll, and boil, and we are scarcely able to determine where we can go. Now the boat is carried to the right, perhaps close to the wall; again, she is shot into the stream, and perhaps is dragged over to the other side, where, caught in a whirlpool, she spins about. We can neither land nor run as we please. The boats are entirely unmanageable; no order in their running can be preserved; now one, now another, is ahead, each crew laboring for its own preservation.*

As a boy, he always wanted to be in the first car. There he could press against the glass of the forward door, cupping his hands on either side of his face to block the reflected light from inside the train. This gave him a view of the track like that of the motorman (whom he could hear shuffling behind the locked door to his right). As the subway rushed through the dark, there were exciting glimpses of ladders and passageways. Who went there? And occasionally, with blaring horn and screeching wheels, they would pass work crews pressed against the walls, or leaning casually on pick axes. . .almost touching the deadly third rail. At times a red light stopped them for long minutes in the dark. Then, the surge of power. Dirty light bulbs flashed by; the subway rocked noisily on its tracks. When a station approached (the bright ring of lights rushing toward them) he feared, for an instant, that the motorman had forgotten to brake, or had died between stations.

In such a place we come to another rapid. Two of the boats run it perforce. One succeeds in landing, but there is no foothold by which to make a portage, and she is pushed out again into the stream. The next minute a great reflex wave fills the open compartment; she is waterlogged, and drifts unmanageable. Breaker after breaker rolls over her, and one capsizes her. The men are thrown out; but they cling to the boat, and she drifts down some distance, alongside of us, and we are able to catch her.*

As I continued to pound the spice, a vital connection seemed to establish itself between the muscles of my fingers curved tightly around the smooth pestle in its insistent downward motion, and the molten core of my body whose source emanated from a new ripe fullness just beneath the pit of my stomach. That invisible thread, taut and sensitive as a clitoris exposed, stretched through my curled fingers up my round brown arm into the moist reality of my armpits, whose warm sharp odor with a strange new overlay mixed with the ripe garlic smells from the mortar and the general sweat-heavy aromas of high summer.**

His subway pass gave him the freedom of the city. He could get on and ride . . .Three basic routes: one of exploration, one of everyday anxiety, one forbidden. The first, "downtown," was defined by the IRT 7th Ave. line. (Certain stops: the freedom of the subway is the power to duck under unpleasant places.) The end of the trip was usually the Village. On weekdays he followed the second path, to his school in a "changing neighborhood." This route was safe and familiar, though tinged with anxiety on the two blocks between Broadway and Columbus. (During the 1950s, the third, and largest, wave of Puerto Rican immigration was transforming sections of the city.) His third route was marked by the magic trick performed on the uptown platform at 96th Street: it was the express train to Harlem, never taken. His freedom, his city. Routes and roots.

But there was no black-elm in Harlem, no black oak leaves to be had in New York City. Ma-Mariah, her root-woman grandmother, had taught her well under the trees of Noel's Hill in Grenville, Grenada, overlooking the sea. Aunt Anni and Ma-Liz, Linda's mother, had carried it on. But there was no call for this knowledge now; and her husband Byron did not like to talk about home because it made him sad, and weakened his resolve to make a kingdom for himself in this new world. . . .She did not know if the stories about white slavers she read in the *Daily News* were true or not, but she knew to forbid her children ever to set foot in any candystore. We were not even allowed to buy penny gumballs from the machines in the subway. Besides being a waste of precious money, the machines were slot machines and therefore evil, or at least suspect as connected with white slavery—the most vicious kind, she'd say ominously. **

His uncle, who had been a hobo, strummed and sang "Mountain Dew" or "Mama Don't Allow No Guitar Playin." His father, a professor of English literature, sang sentimental cowboy ballads. He was raised on Verdi and Gilbert and Sullivan. On the weekend trips downtown he became a fan of The Weavers. Pete Seeger's wavering voice and twangy banjo, especially, excited him. He learned to play and sing like Pete. The Weavers performed medleys: "Songs Around the World." An Irish fiddle tune, a Virginia reel, an African chant, a Negro spiritual, an Israeli Hora, a Japanese song about the Hiroshima bomb. Every song and tradition was accessible, noble, progressive. All "folk music."

It was in Mexico City those first few weeks that I started to break my lifelong habit of looking down at my feet as I walked along the street. There was always so much to see, and so many interesting and open faces to read, that I practiced holding my head up as I walked, and the sun felt hot and good on my face. Wherever I went, there were brown faces of every hue

meeting mine, and seeing my own color reflected upon the streets in such great numbers was an affirmation for me that was brand-new and very exciting. I had never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it.••

In the city he was surrounded by black rhythm and blues, Gospel, and soul, by music from the Caribbean, by rock n' roll. He learned to dance to these beats later, in college. Entering the subway at Columbia University, he emerged, 100 blocks south, in a global village. Folk music included every people and culture—as long as they hadn't been "commercialized." ("To everyone in all the world, I reach my hand. I shake their hand.") In his village, there were no uncomfortable antagonisms. ("He's got the whole world in his hands.") Race meant we shall overcome; class meant solidarity forever, gender meant love oh careless love, sexuality. . .? He disapproved when Bob Dylan "sold out" by playing an electric guitar. Chuck Berry and Little Richard were alien bodies.

This fissure is narrow, and I try to climb up to the bench, which is about forty feet overhead. I have a barometer on my back, which rather impedes my climbing. The walls of the fissure are of smooth limestone, offering neither foot nor hand hold. So I support myself by pressing my back against one wall and my knees against the other, and, in this way, lift my body, in a shuffling manner, a few inches at a time, until I have, perhaps, made twenty-five feet of the distance, when the crevice widens a little, I cannot press my knees against the rock in front with sufficient power to give me support in lifting my body, and I try to go back. This I cannot do without falling.•

He had one recurring nightmare about the city. It was dark, and he was sprinting along his home block. . .chased by "gangs." They had switchblades and wide, garrison belts with sharp buckles. The dream would end with him frantically fumbling for his keys at the apartment house door. Gang members wore black leather jackets. The beats, in the Village, wore black. The white girls with long hair who emerged from the subway at Sheridan Square wore black tights and turtlenecks. (He wore bluejeans and checked shirts.) What did blackness mean? He wished he had dark hair, like a "real" New Yorker (did he mean Jew?). He wished he could slick back his dark hair, a long comb in his back pocket (did he mean Elvis?). Rock n' roll was for the ones in black leather. What did blackness mean to him? He wished he could play better blues guitar (but he never got around to learning).

That summer all of New York, including its museums and parks and avenues was our backyard. . . .When we decided to be workers, we wore loose pants and packed our shoe-dyed lunchboxes, and tied red bandanas

around our throats. We rode up and down fifth avenue on the old open double-decker omnibuses, shouting and singing union songs at the top of our lungs. . . .When we decided to be hussies we wore tight skirts and high heels that hurt, and followed handsome respectable-looking lawyer types down Fifth and Park Avenues, making what we thought were salacious worldly comments about their anatomies in loud voices. . . .When we were African we wrapped our heads in gaily printed skirts and talked our own made-up language in the subway on the way down to the Village. When we were Mexican, we wore full skirts and peasant blouses and huaraches and ate tacos, which we bought at a little stall in front of Fred Leighton's on MacDougal street. Once we exchanged the word "fucker" for "mother" in a whole day's conversation, and got put off the Number 5 bus by an irate driver.**

His parents, born and raised in Evansville Indiana, moved to New York when he was three months old. His father once spent several years in Arizona, teaching at a ranch school for boys, where he learned to twirl a rope and jump through it. His ten-gallon hat smelled of sweat and was incredibly heavy. Once near Tucson, so the story went, his father climbed the Enchanted Mesa, at hair-raising risk, dangling out over sheer cliffs. His grandparents in Evansville were pillars of the community, church people, founders of Evansville College. Some of them were members of a teetotalers' club, "The Pink Poppers," who picnicked, Sunday afternoons, on sand bars in the Ohio River. (The Mason-Dixon Line ran along the river at that spot.) They didn't cross much into Kentucky, except for a trip to Mammoth Cave. Their grandson went into the 7th Ave. subway at 116th Street, and came home singing music from across the river, the hillbilly music they heard on their radios, and turned off.

On Saturday afternoons, sometimes, after my mother finished cleaning the house, we would go looking for some park to sit in and watch the trees. Sometimes we went to the edge of the Harlem river at 142nd street to watch the water. Sometimes we took the D train and went to the sea. Whenever we were close to water, my mother grew quiet and soft and absent-minded. Then she would tell us wonderful stories about Carriacou, where she had been born, amid the heavy smell of limes. She told us stories about plants that healed and about plants that drove you crazy, and none of it made much sense to us children because we had never seen any of them.**

His grandmother had a room in their New York apartment, when she was past eighty and he was five. She had come there to die. White haired and going blind, she walked with a cane; he was her eyes, crossing the street on her daily walk. She spoke to him as if he were an adult, about the Korean

War (she was a pacifist) and about her fantastic trip around the world. When she was twenty, she had accompanied a friend from college, daughter of a famous diplomat, on a semi-official mission to Europe, Egypt, India, and China. Her room in the apartment was different, furnished with favorite antiques brought from Indiana. There was a big four poster bed, where she entertained her grandchildren with early-morning stories. There was an oriental rug, a massive, polished bureau, a writing desk with many pigeonholes, a globe, and a trunk holding papers and large brown photos: the pyramids, the Ganges, the Taj Mahal. In his grandmother's room he saw a picture of Mount Everest. (She told how she had watched the clouds miraculously lift to reveal the summit!) And a giant brick from the Great Wall of China.

Carriacou was not listed in the index of the *Goode's School Atlas* nor in the *Junior Americana World Gazette* nor appeared on any map that I could find, and so when I hunted for the magic place during geography lessons or in free library time, I never found it, and came to believe my mother's geography was a phantasy or crazy or at least too old-fashioned, and in reality maybe she was talking about the place other people called Curaçao, a Dutch possession on the other side of the Antilles. But underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper. . .**

The walls, now, are more than a mile in height—a vertical distance difficult to appreciate. Stand on the south steps of the Treasury building, in Washington, and look down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol Park, and measure this distance overhead, and imagine cliffs to extend to that altitude, and you will understand what I mean; or, stand at Canal street, in New York, and look up Broadway to Grace Church, and you have about the distance; or, stand at Lake street bridge in Chicago, and look down to the Central Depot, and you have it again.*

The Carter Family, Flatt and Scruggs, Bill Monroe—his grandmother's people tuned them out. Lower class, "white trash" music from across the river. He felt the same about Elvis. But bluegrass, with its roots in traditional country music, moved him. (Later he would discover that bluegrass was never simply from across the river, from the "country." It thrived in industrial centers like Gary, or Detroit, carried to displaced proletarians, not by acoustic banjos and mandolins, but by radio waves.) The world he grew up in was built on a country-city opposition: school in New York, long summer months in Vermont. His playmates there were farm kids. The country was supposed to be different from the city; you had to "escape" New York in the summer. (But other friends in Vermont were the kids of

similar "summer people," mostly ex-communists, from the Village.) He travelled to the country in the city, and vice versa.

The Colorado is never a clear stream, but for the past three or four days it has been raining much of the time, and the floods, which are poured over the walls, have brought down great quantities of mud, making it exceedingly turbid now. The little affluent, which we have discovered here, is a clear, beautiful creek, or river, as it would be termed in this western country, where streams are not abundant. We have named one stream, away above, in honor of the great chief of the "Bad Angels," and, as this is in beautiful contrast to that, we conclude to name it "Bright Angel."*

Pearl Primus, the African-American dancer, had come to my high school one day and talked about African women after class, and how beautiful and natural their hair looked curling out into the sun, and as I sat there listening (one of fourteen Black girls in Hunter High School) I thought, that's the way god's mother must have looked and I want to look that way too so help me god. In those days I called it a natural, and kept calling it natural when everyone else called it crazy. It was a strictly homemade job done by a Sufi Muslim on 125th street, trimmed with the office scissors and looking pretty raggedy. When I came home from school that day my mother beat my behind and cried for a week.**

Surrounded by black and Latin cultures, he travelled to the Village, where he discovered a pure white music. (He read much later about the interconnections of bluegrass and black minstrelsy.) Around him, New York was changing, a place of crossed roots. Rock music—white, black, and Latin—was breaking out all over. Around him, the city was being "Caribbeanized." But he hardly knew Barbados or Jamaica from Haiti. And "Puerto Rico" meant only a gang of juvenile delinquents in "West Side Story." He read about all this history later.

I climb so high that the men and boats are lost in the black depths below, and the dashing river is a rippling brook; and still there is more canyon above than below. All about me are interesting geological records. The book is open, and I can read as I run. All about me are grand views, for the clouds are playing again in the gorges. But somehow I think of the nine days rations, and the bad river, and the lesson of the rocks, and the glory of the scene is but half seen. I push on to an angle, where I hope to get a view of the country beyond, to see, if possible, what the prospect may be of our soon running through this plateau, or, at least. of meeting with some geological change that will let us out of the granite; but, arriving at the point, I can see below only a labyrinth of deep gorges.*

Lying in bed he listened to noises from the court. He could just hear his mother talking on the phone at the far end of the corridor, while Burl Ives 78s spun in a room nearby. The court. . .the court was an accumulator of city sounds, a great conch outside his sixth-floor bedroom. Through the half-opened window he heard snatches of talk, a slammed door, sirens, an airplane, jazz, a car starting, base notes, a scraping noise, laughter, something crashing, echoing on the pavement far below. His drowsy ear collected all the separate parts of a complex hum that never ceased, day or night. Known and unknown New Yorks.

When we came down from the roof later, it was into the sweltering midnight of a west Harlem summer, with canned music in the streets and the disagreeable whines of overtired and overheated children. Nearby, mothers and fathers sat on stoops or milk crates and striped camp chairs, fanning themselves absently and talking or thinking about work as usual tomorrow and not enough sleep. . .It was not onto the pale sands of Whydah, nor the beaches of Winneba or Annamabu, with cocopalms softly applauding and crickets keeping time with the pounding of a tar-laden, treacherous, beautiful sea. It was onto 113th street that we descended after our meeting under the Midsummer Eve's Moon, but the mothers and fathers smiled at us as we strolled down to Eighth Avenue, hand in hand.••

Blanche—he recalled very black skin, glasses, and a voice. For several years, when he was five or six, she was in their apartment twice a week, doing laundry and housecleaning. She was distant, deliberate, a little intimidating. (Much later, he thought he recognized Blanche in an essay by Paule Marshall about the Barbadian women who came to New York during the interwar years—women who worked hard to make a home in "this man's country" while maintaining a certain "aloofness.") Her speech, the thick Caribbean English, bothered him. Blanche was old. He remembered her worn, pressed work dress, her loose brown stockings, glasses (rimless?), and thin, strong, black arms and fingers. Their dog barked and barked each time she came in the front door, hurrying to a private corner of the pantry where she hung her coat and changed for work.

Our rations are still spoiling; the bacon is so badly injured that we are compelled to throw it away. By an accident this morning, the saleratus is lost overboard. We have now only musty flour sufficient for ten days, a few dried apples, but plenty of coffee. We must make all haste possible. If we meet with difficulties, as we have done in the canyon above, we may be compelled to give up the expedition, and try to reach the Mormon settlements to the north. Our hopes are that the worst places are passed, but our barometers are all so much injured as to be useless, so we have lost

our reckoning in altitude, and know not how much descent the river has yet to make.*

From Barbados by way of Canada, she lived alone somewhere in Harlem. Later, he learned more from his mother, who admired Blanche and regretted not having done more than pay the low, going wage and send in regular social security contributions. ("She spent her whole life cleaning other people's dirty houses. And when she retired and went back to Barbados, she was proud to have saved enough for a burial. That's so important for people like her.") Blanche helped his mother, who struggled to manage a large household, with advice about housework. And she got on well with his grandmother. They were close in age, and shared an old fashioned courtesy and Christian outlook. His grandmother always had "colored" help, back in Evansville. Blanche asked for respect and got it from the white haired lady. (Perhaps they shared, too, a feeling of marginality in the New York apartment, of coming from another time and place.) The same couldn't be said for the kids. He and his sister were sometimes disrespectful, even cruel, in ways (like the dog's prolonged barking) that Blanche knew had to do with her race. She became indignant, lecturing them on their bad behavior.

And I remember Afrikete, who came out of a dream to me always being hard and real as the fire hairs along the under-edge of my navel. She brought me live things from the bush, and from her farm set out in cocoyams and cassava—those magical fruit which Kitty bought in the West Indian markets along Lenox Avenue in the 140s or in the Puerto Rican *bodegas* within the bustling market over on Park Avenue and 116th Street under the Central Railroad structures.**

Blanche worked slowly through the apartment. Sometimes she talked to herself. And she asked for just one special thing: that she always have a hot lunch, with meat—a hamburger, whitefish, a chicken pot pie, something. Only after seeing her cold room, which contained a single hotplate, did his mother realize how crucial these "proper" lunches were. She made the journey into Harlem only once, when Blanche was ill and confined to bed. Did she take the express at 96th street, or was it the 125th Street crosstown bus? His mother couldn't remember much about the trip except dirty streets, a squalid building, and Blanche's clean, small place.

The canyon walls, for two thousand five hundred or three thousand feet, are very regular, rising almost perpendicularly, but here and there set with narrow steps, and occasionally we can see away above the broad terrace, to distant cliffs.*

CLARK COOLIDGE
from CITY IN REGARD

6.

Nobody will fuck through the wall
but it's early
those long blocks
could use a ferris wheel
I knocked on
Akhmatova's spindle over
no waiting, one room in thirty years
leafing through backyards
the offspring cat
rattling transmission pan, lost thought
poets
all having been to the same
the loudness of poetry
and deafness of sense
I just sailed a yacht
pendulum
labor is?

This world has six prongs and I
don't want to be sad
I want height
over between it is
the sailor's tie and lemon salad
these my thoughts
down dark blocks
below blue domes

Cloth wheels that come through
the grease of rice
my pause in jeans
and a red glass light
fronted many, encomiums few
deserted interiors, glass to the mere side
eggs and bread, I never ate so fairly
lost
then sent to the north
he became the poet
he later lost

This
a lot of district calling
above the field of mere size
ceiling sent abed
whirlpool proportion vitamins
he reached the door just before
the circle that had formed
my poetics in a pinch
nothing filled
Zen wind, beginner's sand

Stop those lowering doors
the painter held
goes off in his cap
his fencing of the totaled range
nobody has
this place everybody
wine the ladders
rhapsody in ones of balcony
or just about sound urgency?

His cap came off the tilted wall
of vampire
waiting on the captain for
the rice to duel

the horror show terrific
we saw
everything there
that was today
and spoke with nobody

A world where Matisse has no mouth
stops breaking differences
I scaled the glass
through a well to the snare
I think something strange is bound
goose is the same here
I knew from the start that

Shot apart suddenly
those two with the hairs
in a globe a golden tar window
street star pouring wide
thumbs under, a poodle on a stick
where anything that happens is wrong
watch the cinemas fill up with mall
waste
I'm impatient now that I have
to use

7.

On the gradient of completion
a past master marries us
through

It's so transitory, stopping by the one
word, then the one word, then the one
ideally it all should vanish like
unrecorded music into the present of
the next start, a craziness my time has
none of the space

was already beyond me, I miss
the Leningrad stanzas
Leningrad blocks

Brass snakes
filthy frames
Susan and the Old
Ozone Fans

Washing dishes, mishearing terms
handing glasses and taking bills
in the movement of mountains
nothing holds

Nothing on the path forward
there's
collapsed geodes in the lungs
time to quit trawling for dates
or numb skulls, buy a real one?
secure me some bisecular walls

The ruins were symmetrical
the chaos would be complete
I knew then that I'd always love you

8.

This getting to be old
tinker shop on rye
with a dead tongue
but with cloud cover rise
just the same and sets
today's sun on told tiles
flats that look like factories
look like ruins, untold
there are nut varieties
but from the poet's the trees

the crows, what do we look at?
not even thinking
the nonsense of a berry tree
the mirror that reflects
the lamp out of use
section this hill and manage
the beans, I hear it all led
to your iron with ropes
even though you betrayed
by heart light of dark traits
reductions of a golden eye

The then another
she says of whom
how he is still
exhausted from his birth

To trail along nightmare routes
empty buildings glow and char
exemplary done

Then the better thing will be what
a tube through the ceiling?
a man sitting up by a curb
passersby put him dazedly up
the man bloodies through
glass wall of the bar
sits with stain, chin in hand
we eat in our room

This will be
the Capital of Coincidentia?
what's that whirly thing
coming through his stomach?
pure guts through the clear
margins like love
I live wherever I can have it

humming just a gigolo of a monk
in Leningrad's score streets
a memory of Sue's changes now
in the first secretary's office
a secret passage in the paneling
through which come the coffees
and I am taciturn from near
passing out, wrong pills
a locomotive collides
with a building block, kids
play backhouse soccer, claws of Anzio
the trenches of Remora
dump the ten things
down the same drain

Set abrupt in language streets
what if it was the anguish school?
and I had nothing serious to point to
a clove on red sandstone piece
on a sawed trunk
he site in teak thinking up
a future holy furniture
toboggans here?

And the cat that lives at the basis
the ticking of the cat in the hallway
I don't think about sentences anymore
but would like to get something to
stink like a finger
the tango of a coin

Where every thing is hard
where is the sacred formation?
I *least*ways like to talk
what you are doing is too serious
to worry about, I don't want
to talk soul with pikers
the plumbing comes loose from the cry
circular
edge around its casting, the word for it

I write in little sand notebooks
and otherwise find no books
not to think about
sealing my name in things
like anvils in Petrograd?
I saw the Morrison Encampment
and I was circled in bait
visit the mausoleum and see
nothing
breathe, wear winter duds out
stay up until there are scrapings
through the ceilings
I am a filer of walls

How many bottles of fossils
in the floors?
I prefer cow pens
clowns with aims
delicious pads
endless thud basements in
Bedstead Heights
and the hoppers that
rearrange the sift there
no one to live there, but something
I hear the drain
gone away of the moon fluids
for us were the silence within
never knelt together completely
could I enter this for you better?
blood on the floor, entrance to the castle
then we used their harmers
hand me a piece of that
puzzle of pragmatism
I'll soak it in my watch
to suddenly see all
the brass there is in time

I sat on the horizon so it wouldn't, please no flattery
put on an album? a lemon sash, punk prod window, a tonguing
there are no longer any ones here on the floor, my floor of ash
trailed by the neat stains, half an egg, thoughts grown lower
as clothing eyes to the floor, a floor of nebulous and sag fish
pumpkin wads, a trail of all the desks in harbor, thrall to
tongue alternatively, pen to the side of the lost, off-hand bunk

Now in which movie will you move to? invention
that does us here to there to marksmanship dip pluperfect
a dimension slaughter-called as dog outlines, where the fear is
that what's eaten will not do, or do only all too well off
in some other hole, there's finery and then there are plain walls
before where the mirror was, the beacon of pearls to camouflage
horrible elaborate dumpling verb each of us have a cog in
one of me at a time will serve

To establish what's beneath, bend a hat and sip
long slots meet new heights, bare breath of the heartless fancier
loose from his lapels, hand on the bank, lights rowing past
seek me in the diminishing game, well ahead and skull rampant
I've nothing left to shoot you with I'll go below, no sound
sands they've covered well in the lights, our passing thoughts
so who's missing when standing and the door closes?

Not what's down here but what's below down here
girders to a sapphire bird, flightless no doubt the papers will firm
[it that
ex-credenza masters as we're standing there against walls below
[ground
in the wind, he heaved it higher faster like as if a camera misted
would grow weightless waiting or carry all cigars under the arms
here are the woken lights and the clothes you could wear to
[match them
corn as smooth as silk goes by as the pearls are pulled through
could stand a meatless mention of any of this, pelted upon from
visible ceilings, arches weighing nothing, talks as the failure of
[future variations

Somehow got her tongue stuck below the earth
deepest catwalk where the navel protrudes, is this whose
fire circus or a committal trailer the edge police exact?
nine miles inner the woven wave is waken, alibis intermittent
a perishing snow rail for the inner cities to dangle beneath from
but does it all need to wave to wake you? how homegone
are you bound? a similar smell to the deepest arcades?
mail to the map spotters this froggy bent cavorting, this bat
[shorter
there may be a deepest room for it all, not

Then are lost, but then are
crowded till the watching of walls is all
now upstairs the closer and closer frames are
which way to the gaze point, less laughter at all
made hills of it are, paint slow braid in time
on the elastic latch we stray and watch
abandoned, retraced ourselves to the gold room and rose

What was lost to go up? where the winds go through
like nothing in chains, and the gold rinse rises in yards
beyond all cold advance, what would we seem we would see?
the rooms are too deviant on this level plan for no light
we must see with our eyes alone, no other aids
no stanching of the posture fronted, elbowed with oils
were you there by my side taking care that the flight would be
[endless?

Gold won't be raised for these blocks, goings not taken
for heights deep shafts of light, of a sun that baffles
we haul our blockage to the mist hotel and wait for this sky
to erase whatever pictures, whatever won't go whole a wall of it
pasteboard books to fire your flail functions, joins that glow
as if peat recede, too many portraits of tongue in the hair gallery
too many caps that face lost our steps

But find it all we lapsed, up and caught the time enabled
to stand before the sighing dance the singling tongs of hoist
[ceased
this physics it lowers us, the cancel fits fine no waiting
no plugged waltz or primer kit left on landing, did we see?
so doing did we make the next night, whatever marked off could
[be passed
a large lump in icing, face struck where a door should have
[paled
I show vitamins here and you call them dirigible

Starved to the forms I would flee from I see
these pictures could not be here, must make mentions else
to be not, I do not whelm much but leave museums
by the north door, they see only my ankles, am seen out and lost
[again
seeking more blind hosts at arms and marked at *my* harm
there are verses where and stairs piled in moth packets
nebulae hungry though risen strictly in time, pale at a stoop

Is this Cinderella under all this ice?
her blurry cape got caught on my lip on tile way to the poet's
[rafter
logs bend to the stone as we sidle, keep it up and fill your
[arches
there are greetings here and hours when these stones will danger
[watchers
the trunk coming out of its brace to sly alive in a buckle turning
these skunks have oxygen and train it, pearly on the elbow favor
wholly on the drunken river braver locked and found low

On the way to the river high housing is lost by the inch
and there are the barer couplings, itches where the idle backs of
[fairs
lock steps to the tongue catch, these hands with raising ride the
[bus
come bright at faint night of blaze scraps in a winter warmer
and these are flakes they'll strap them, bend over and spot a cap
but then are dangling none, the widest streets be spared, diced
and bright to a lot later on the cave shift, when to cabs
the single figure left the picture

But being vary day, in it own we
freedom to inhabit the forms of the spirit
or whose gust prow do you shade in flag?
but I won't live here than be not anywhere
gone stoned in the draft where the weatherboards are blonde
appliances clogged and turns to wait at last passed
didn't fall but was pushed, didn't wave but was missed
by a sharper gas, a blinder pulse than came to hand
here nothing loose has not been fastened

Maybe it was the back room of the month
but I sit in distance before I march, since
people live in houses at a time, I will move there
bringing on the fronts I have entered, a dock at a desk
a pen as a first, do you have the address of this
this or have options but they hang outside the windows
an elephant in France as good a match
do me a favor free of hunch, hands to face okay?

Hook me a planet space, sounds to run away from?
I am the misser who holds landings and I drop to tea
follow, the entrance low as dark, then wind in as up
bracket stories, hum of the passing private inner pictures
they all own them, place them in creak of cooking beyond frame
indulgence away beneath, plain as if money were summering
I followed the war from in here, onionware, salt as steam
signing the paper I talk to you

I woke up in a window or under its greenish intentions
placed in dream under the narrow green, be warm and rest there
where above is your life a crack comes loose at the top, lift it
what was feared from green, a raising cloth of close issues
do we remember or recall the food? the pipes concealed in
[trunks
in verves of tenacious swimming muscle held under glow open
[day
does the door have your dog? I raised a fiddle
you matched me, we held up our ledges, then I slept a twig
then raced our mountains in a paris green glare, lever to the tree
[blooms
the glass is thinner here to wear

Something? apples in the blackest of boilers
the talk turns out strong, have a drift, is it well?
apples in the mention of stories may not mend, take a skull
is it true? lingo lasts, go to jazz, so I monkey
with what mumbled under, three glasses to every grace
and a lawyer turned away from this bound door, this thread a
[stand
at a voice another layer turned to see under hand

This will be a desperate work, what I have seen
the spire a monument to air, casement beckon open again
or close air in the closed insect vest, apparent meeting
a fist that could forget and still hold this handle?
fit steps in the puzzle meet so go down in alien
a mind that is curtains and beveled the less, an aid
I don't stop for these clouds in the room, short of gather
hear my word, stop my hand

Then he barely handed us on, the late on a tangle
stars blinded, helmets were raised, a pinhole through to nothing
parts past the gate, the elbow of slats, heats by and carts
smiling enders all packed, I have lived along these lines
nothing to hold for, all parked in patience, an elbow lava
a plate left for the missing, those held in wait
the whole ruin a locked patience, battery trap
those with eyes held gone from

A certain green dark but did I know from what was said
a fight was caused by lamps, interference lobby, a twitter to
[come from
a writing first lies then ravels, marks made around the knob
a parting newel, shelves where the ship landed, phone aid things
have you gane down, ace, have you chickened, pile to the star
at the end of this night, this imperiling furl to the knees
the winds, there's a cold at this corner, a book I must need

Substantive in arson on an oriented garden shed
threw us sort of
as if a spine shaft with propeller blades
a gift of the tongue sharp among weeds
then a honk and the advice to study
stare as they're made
advice about asbestos
in the mall they bend over
to the inside of a flashlight with nothing

•

And what would you feel should hang below the paintings to say
wipe my tea feel my tray hook my coat?
these are prismatic wishes in that they tend
a twirling series of snaps a chain erases
I had it harder than my head with these hands
they were shaken when entering the pyre
we couldn't imagine waiting for
what was in those eyes

•

in the moment there are no witnesses
and the wind turning up to cover it
a notch of realization
a soft outing of wearing the violin
an edge on variation
a shifting of the preposition's spire
back to the handled ones
who think it's wise to ignore the poles they pass

•

I wait for the eyes
will not invent things to
see through
to the short behind the mask
the baseboard revolver holder
to come free to jaw on to chin on
to wait
I have nothing but the snow in my future
savagery

•

All this informing is only a net
one is placed to
a dealing of voices through the temperature's walls
which are self swells
crowned with the clothing strength of ravines
a parapet nature
a whole hall to contain one carburetor
and down its aisle we slide

•

The truth once in hand
can never be translated
shortened portrayed peeled
the larval entity is a standup
coat won't be moved from this lodge
but I sit in the winter I sit at the window
whatever I relay muzzled
portentous and frayed
a butler couldn't mention to you
in the story as was had

•

But in the story it was hard
no hand of the writer would fall in line
give me a room I could say anything at all
munch the newtons off a brick wall
not sag
but was stumped at the desk
of ease and northern openings

•

I placed my room on the ledge provided
it's anyone's gaff to starve up forward
a place to stretch just as stark as
but this station gone all open to your weeping
too many boxes and those that were in them
a trampoline of an expenditure
we went all over for the signs
saw none came back tapped our tongues
freed at the last despair

•

You go by use into everything
the truth lucked out in the past
patterns of pastels warning where nothing
I got so used to noticing I couldn't come indoors
then in the great weight of paper
at the back of the passions
I won't read the poet who holds his dogs in line

•

I mean it would be awkward to prime all this ice
the abandoned nature of lumber
a holdup in the outskirts
a matter of the creative dull
but we were left here without clothing
without marvels to be unspooled
we added up to faint toil
the finagling of fancy fingers

•

The experience as of mud
shocked to the rivets
partial moles and vegetable fins
a cabinet for the confining of remnants
next street over club stake
rules by the number of ruts
classified or classicized meaning
carbonized to a tee
as if sent back out to
the one tree to dream of stockings

•

I bowed and opened
the dictionary to milk
turn on the plain of intention
penis to nipple there are no comparisons
just flavors in bunches at the lair

•

We'd get near the door he'd turn on the box
had all his things hatched in their proper ladderways
we couldn't incorporate but he'd ring true
one door held a hall key the other a rail stake
a real pain of song
through to the intention mines
then the notes flew on an orange their webs had long wet
and we did we came

•

History is not listening to what has been raised
at all in a north hole
what an awl drilled in an onyx pole
getting the spheres kind of shrill
the world beyond this fall had long been raining
so very certainly no one was asking
and now I'm writing
peering at one valence of the single clue

•

But I dream all the night now
so what is it that sleeps?

•

You say this is a science?
much of this goes to the green sirens
and wane lines on our canopy
is this an open bubble?
said their nomenclature was disreputable
and ought to be snowed
or I should get home and plow

•

I do not own all these rivers over here in the handcuffs
nights of one bullet out of a freedom reign
or adequacy
I kept noting things down in this kitchen
home of a moderate to low-deal pumping
for alteration and the tumour that smokes
some poems are little but gear ratios
We'd have to hear hard to put away
some poems are nothing but lit stores

•

But why doesn't the lemon light on the barricade
break it down?
those frozen all in a line
and tramp tramp the boys are loosening
midnight of Bartleby et alia
a blue Slow over the last begonias
and iron of a stuck up subway root
these red oxides were destroyed as a fact
by the sound

•

Through the offices of starlings
the folly spoken in a settee of tightening apples
So we aimlessly play with the symmetry of time eh?
we don't know anything about where you're ending up
these are not perceptions so hard they vibrate till you return
these are rather real people that imitate each other
call me brother or call it a night

•

With a grey lighting just to the side
pages of this and a page of that
apartment as yellow as cat
strike a gel to the hue of a tuning fork
then what do you bet
I wear darkness

•

You shouldn't wear out the decoration side
of all these matters there is trespass
as quiet as the fur it takes to properly close
with which parts of my opening mouth are hung
a mosquito and a clock terrible
in their closeness

•

Along the stumping mire the apology twits
one's grace for an armload of poetics
in merry caps and waste briar lengths
you would only move to take my shaker up
and plunk it deep in a casuistical mine
dense as sense only
marched into treated territory
are the guests that that need implies

•

I will hate them bright then sit and simmer in a bar
give off cake offers and salad turns
it's all the mumps to a manual
from which the officials in spectacles recover
a coin rolled into a gutter
from which spasms of fat hair
a clay man and a spiracle
it best be winter with you centered on you
drinking a drain around your betters

•

That word that you don't need to use so put
before everything
as if entering in its preemptive way the world
the whole that's loose
striking and managing by
turn and by token
we have to make up novels
by ending at the gumption gate

•

They limped around the leaned up canvases
thought in volleys in the jail of aims
a jellified inclusion so who's the better actor
mine is the sails in a granite of drums
coiled and wearing
moving over to vote only once
the tuber is boiled
the children are hacked from my ankles

•

Here an interior of the globe is made
hung in green discards
there the lovers have descended from their wallets
a skinny tingling of syntax
and borrowed weather rhythms strange and dull
we turned off the fall and entered autumn in a carriage
a folio of dressing dreams begins to glow down
the counter of all forms in a brimming hand

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
TEN POEMS *from* UNDER WORLD ARREST

SHORT STORY

Begin with this: the world has no origin.
We encircle the moment, lovers,
who, encircling each other, steep in
the fantasy:
now we know the meaning of life.

Wordsworth's *recollection:* wreck election,
the coddling of ruins, as if the oldest man
thinking of the earliest thing
offers imagination its greatest bounty.

A poem is a snake sloughing off the momentary,
crawling out of now (the encasement of
its condition)
into layered, mattered, time.
Now is the tear and ear of terra's torn era.
For the serpentine, merely a writhe
in appetite.

We posit Origin in order to posit End,

and if your drinking water is sewage,
to do so is understandable.

When the water is pure, Lilith's anatomy
is glimpsable in each drop.

But the water is never pure.

Before time, there appears to have been
a glass of pure water.

Therefore, we speculate, after time,
there will be another.

Life, a halo surrounding emptiness.

Continue with this: not body vs. soul,
but the inherent doubleness of any situation.
Thus in fusion there is also abyss.

Conclusion: I am suspended between origin and now,
or between origin and a bit before now.
Unknotting myself from both ends,
I drop through the funnel the y in abyss offers.

Nothing satisfies. And,
my suffering is nothing. Two postage stamps
glued, back to back,
abysscadabra.

What is missing? A poetry so full of claws
as to tear the reader's face off.
Not enough? Look at what men do to women.
Why should art be less?

Poetry's horrible responsibility:
in language to be the world.

[for Don Byrd]

THERE IS NEITHER FATHER NOR MOTHER
when I am made.

My blood is created from the fruit
of first forms.

Of elephant graveyards
Of pulled-out eternity staves
Of the sensation of orgasm as the goad
of all one's power
Of the flowering of shrubbery
Of the earliest horned god carved of
stalagmitic drippings
Of blue veins and vermilion glans
Of the last passenger pigeon
burst in tar
Of the nipple at strut with the goose step
of the cock
Of the face of Art Pepper
Of bruised American pie
Of what in each artist must be a match
for the infinite.

THE BASHO THRILL OF SETTING FORTH,
potential illumination, potential demise.

Dissolution now tied to millennium,
our end and the world's throw
shafts of Don't Look Back into all leaving,
all returning,
creating an undertow resplendent with
abyss.

As if each moment were a preboarding baggage inspection,
a Maya assembly line,
with X-ray screens in the gods' octopodal eyes.

ANTINOMIAN WINDOWS

I fear a louse of phantasmagorical energy,
a stallion maggot refusing to be a fly,
holding all captive,
feeding all, immersing all in contrasoul,
then slaughtering all from within.

•

We are at every moment in swill with nothingness,
in the awe of chaos bottled
as the blood head of male nuclear destruction.
The Grail unidentifiable still
because we have not created a common stone
fluidified with Kali's ichor.

•

I am anchored to Sonoran pronghorn,
to Queensland Rat-kangaroo,
to white-nosed Saki, to you,
disgusting plague of novelty,
shield against which men have crushed the underworld.

AFFIRMATION'S WAKE

havoc of man
"The world is charged with the ~~grandeur of God~~."
It flies through the night, Blake's worm,
the Treblinka Express, gathers in the dispossessed,
concentration cored into a camp.
Where do men get their fury?
From their theft of women's power?
Is what we call the abyss
the ensouling of a surrounding malefestation?

All men carry the perversion of Hopkins' "charged."
"as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky"
As if an old, old unlivable were in Missionary
Position over all that can be taken, gored.

And for all this, there's a sweetness never spent,
a rare freshness that seems,
in the lamblight of torture,
a mesmerizing shield screening off the full
glare of what men do.
O infected brightness! Against your turning-milk
swollen breast
I press my Holy Ghostless head,
a parody of the Somalian babe
sucking through her mother air.

AFTER PINDAR

The Siberian Greco-Roman wrestler,
Aztec obsidian embroidered skull,
muscles plates, or
tectonics, they say some just collapse at his feet.
Is he
the god-force I feel in Vedran Smailovic,
a member of the Sarajevo Opera, in formal evening attire,
playing outside the bakery where Serbian mortars struck
a bread line in late May, killing 22 people.
Every day, for 22 days, Smailovic braved
sniper and artillery fire to play
Albinoni's *Adagio* in honor of those who had died—

Autumn sings, in singe with winter's fangs.

THE SKELETONS TALK TURKEY

As autumn's wheaten quilt furls back,
the sleepers are revealed,
drying stalks, the long flutes of the dead
begin their agitated piping:
"Do you know your bounty is in part our work?
Do you not know that cob and bone,
the armatures of your increase, prove us?
Will you drink mescal through the night
by us, until we share a warped, suicidal pang?
For to forget us is to die from us. . ."

Children, impersonating the dead. How solitary
their shapes under street lamps, Frankenstein,
Little Miss Muffet, wending their way. . .
a month later, in the split-off half of that great
equinox reunion, wolfing down turkey,
thought of the dead is flattened to schoolbook Indians.
O interval rife with smallpoxed and massacred millions!
We use Halloween and Thanksgiving like book ends,
as if to contain their volume. I think of tubercular
Oquendo de Amat's *Cinco Metros de Poemas*—
who does not dream of a book 5 yards wide containing all
it means to be a Peruvian, an American?

In mourning for those with upturned pots for heads,
millions will converge on Lake Titicaca.
There will be a vast weeping tent in the storms of millennium,
when it becomes turgid that
some are frozen, none are thawed.

COOKING

I slide down like a fireman into a cauldron-shaped machine.
The discourse
shifts, scaly zucchini
wants to be scrubbed. Mother said: get out of the tub
soon as you finish washing yourself,
so I scrub and consider the chicken, the cold
under her arms as I carried her into
the hospital toilet. All of life is present every moment.
We know this, or I do, dimly,
I wipe up something from the chopping block, it tastes like
16th Street—best I can do,
my birth? The flecks are more precious than
weight of bird in hand. Open the wine.
Curious, the antagonism wafting from the just-pulled.
But what wants to be opened? Down in the blood force,
I dream while I cook. Dreaming is
a kind of cooking, body between waffle irons of bed and night,
the ghosts of the introjected sipping and picking.
I am closer to Caryl in bed
then at table, but tapers anchor us here.
Are we re-enacting the primal snack
as we cut, munch, and talk? The tall sip of Chinon
that plunges to my belly,
a shore bird zapping up a crab?
Have you looked into your mouth,
considered the Labrador of ice floes, jungular lagoons,
infinitessimal havens and coves under invasion
as the tongue, trapped rhino, goes through its
wrenchings, so articulate
after 20,000 years, then Andrei Codrescu on NPR:
he too hates David Duke—I throw in more Louisiana,
cleaning a shrimp: serrated knife down the back
held against the chopping block edge,
swole gut tract furls back, husk won't disposal, so
I bag'm, thoroughly rinsing the headless, footless
Paleo bodies under harsh cold,

each point of cooking so interesting,
I know you appreciate it
having shopped so carefully for all I fondle.
To clean a squid is to have a hand up the goddess.
To do so makes me want to help a cow give birth.
To cook makes me want to disembowel myself and eat.
Cooking is a form of labyrinthine pacing,
and is without fear, until we make contact with
the soul of the beloved, for whom we cook.
Then the two of us are out on plates
looking up into this gorgeous autumn. We are old,
and sliding about, but the dry golden trash
still clinging to the maples
is a kind of funky Greek Keatsean urn.

Kenneth Burke, 94, is happy for a tasty meal.
He has a chic gray cap, and settles in
at our table on his pillowed chair.
Salmon without oil, or salt,
spinach, rice, Pilsner Urquell.
He said that night: "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty—
Body is Turd, Turd Body" and giggled.

Each evening we sit down to these bodies
in cocoon, these woven green beans,
this artichoke harboring so many compressed
thorny lips. A delicate char molded by
the coldest lake depths,
parts of my mother, parts of our mothers' mothers,
myself, yourself.
The wind rises outside,
the gold, rouge-red, orange bonfired leaves are down.
We are skeletons eating amongst the skeletons.
This
is the delicious thrust and realization.

GORGEOUS GEORGE COMES POUNDING DOWN THE BEACH

On the San Diego Freeway
rising toward Mulholland—
azure ghosts of canyons,
cobalt lime dusk.
Agnostic snarl of art, aerobics, pizza,
valet parking for Trashy Lingerie.
Sun tinsel streaming in 5 PM light so strong,
my eyes close driving, open to helicopters
walking the backyard on stalks of light.
Bricolage of tar Maya movie plaster.
"Hi, my name's Bruce, I'm your waiter,
I tried to kill myself last night."
Gladiator bright, collapsable city.
The Rolfed young man cries I am,
not realizing I am does not see.
So I'm 13, in my Aunt Georgia's trailer,
off Mulholland. I've been parked here
while the adults play Canasta.
Stretched out on the bunk bed,
turn on the tiny TV:
Gorgeous George comes pounding down the beach,
platinum locks atoss, bikinied,
as if strolling the infinite.
Nature's radiation appears
an angel layered in coke
stretched out on sushi cooler ice,
Goddess Ikatakomagurouni.
LAX landing lights flashing hero no one
while up the Strip I chug
below the toe level of billboard gods,
oily, puffed up in platinum heels.
Jackie Collins' anima-black mane,
neon lips,
"Exquisitely jacketed in depths of anthracite."
Madonna, "The Frida Kahlo Story,"
lacquered red nails,

silky hair crisscrossed in meticulous
braids—visited by the Rockefellers,
her unhealable abdominal wound.
Perhaps Frida is LA's patron saint?

On Melrose, mascaraed punk mannequins
are digging "Day of the Dead." La Muerte:
the exfoliating skull sending north
Mexican macabre gaiety,
dens that abutt globally:
the cleaning woman's husband
decapitated in Guatemala
appears on TV.
Kali-fornia face,
Kali's fornix, Marilyn's whee!
her sagging frontier bodice line
where men are at once larvae and Valentino.
Brittle chrome candy of this Western edge,
haunted not as Brittany by "finisterre"
(thus world-end everywhere)
but by the American Icarus dream: "Mounting
upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse"
Gorgeous George comes pounding up the beach.
Hockney-sketchy immortality
swimming pool deep
a water blue sky in whose bowl
I too steer, imperiled by cancerous fish,
a human being looking like a scuba effete
wandering unpeopled streets, wearing
my house on my head,
my possessions pyramiding my sides,
a mobilary Mesoamerican relief.
Porky and Bugs
come tumbling through the palms,
squirting my sunglasses with hot-dog
shaped diners and saber-tooth perfume!

An early draft of this poem, "Sixteen Years in Los Angeles," appeared in *Temblor* #10.

NAVEL OF THE MOON

The man who is always wanting to see now knew
he must imbibe semen, but in imagination—
as on the openings of the mountainous mother
he had perceived the stones were so alive
they were freezing. He had to release
the semen parachute way too long nailed
to the zenith of male brain,
had to let it pass through his eyes
to experience the octopodal
sensation of submarine drapery,
to be thin as a veil, but also to fit
into the carapace of a crab.
The project, then, is to let the treasure descend
through the interior zoo of chakras,
until Kundalini, blind as Tiresias,
coiled so long her rattles have gone soft,
raises her head and gulps the displaced jade
—not nag, nor strumpet,
but the nearly untranslatable fool's gold,
the glacial division in muelos-elevated man.

It is time to be tender to stone,
to see it as semen, as the finite of the inside
Big Hole Woman scratched animals into.
Or are we all animals of snow
composed of the avalanche of mother's milk,
through which flows a warm but alpine stream?
How you'd love to believe its source is in your head,
maggot in a uniform of buttoned gold!

Autumn, you lie least. As the harvest
swings into full view, the cornucopia tightens.
Could I but interrupt mother and father
for only a moment, could I,
in the sensorium of that smoking lubricity,
inhale a contradiction so total
that, when they started up again,
I would be their rhythm?

Mother, can't you see I'm a root borer?
I am reholing the word that was your breast.
Stand back, ego, shrink to
the immensity of the nipple absence
over which your paradise is stretched.
The soul, most honorable cannibal,
lined with the mead of its oldest kill,
  its blindness.

Caryl's hand touching me
went through my thigh at the rush of love,
which is liquid, relentlessly sweet,
muscle seltzer—but it did not go completely through,
it is suspended,
    she is suspended,
  her hand in my thigh, calming,
how much she calms
  in suspension here.

At Monte Alban, before a *danzante*,
the shadow of Ana Mendieta bends.
A flattened man all surface like Ana,
cheek of stone, a lily-groined hunchback,
pages of a scattered stone book,
dismembered at the core of vision,
three halves that never join,
two orgasms jolting past each other.
Thus compassion. Thus tenderness mixed with gravel.
In the tip of the solar arrow,
I discover my mother tied and splayed.
A great snail has arrived in the plaza.
We cry Beached Whale!
In metaphor, the primal anxiety:
everything is nothing,
something is a toadstool under which
ragged elves are cowering.
How long does it take to get the weight of the earth
  through my head?

Coatlicue leans forward
just enough to offer a worm shade.
Before Her as a man, I felt my infant size
before my mother—or let's say
Coatlicue is the size surrounding the hole
I made in mother's apple—and so, indeed,
I am a worm in the shade Serpent Skirt offers
—with whom one never shakes hands.
One shakes *hearts* with Coatlicue
for she too is part of the cornucopia,
part of the great snail's retinue.
All true answers are questioned by
the 2 rattlesnakes that like facing
question marks fuse as Her head.

Bitter river
poets would say flows into the metaphor-
confabulated split tongue whose root is lost
in Coatlicue's cistern breast,
tongue waving from a peculiar mound—listen:
as if a century plant attempted to free itself
having blossomed, or, have you blossomed?
Was birth that good? Mother's apple that rich?
Isn't your heart always that apple, pumping
serpent, caduceus tree rooted
lower body, her feline hindquarters,
the aroma of her menstrual pool
out of which fairies first flitted?
As I stared at my stool,
the faint blue forms of mountains,
a fat crimson worm entered the mountain,
a male worm wearing a menstrual shawl—then blank,
nothing but milk delivery, the gangue of myth. . .

Against the underlight of Oaxaca
the night sky in suspended rise,
the necropolis in suspended fall.
We are nestled, forever, as now, or never,
in soft bone arms, buttressed by breeze

and the wail from the zenith tube
into which liquid night flows,
a kind of larval ebony for ballplayers' hands,
the braid of events in the fleeing stream,
the present the parachute's weighted pouch,
the past its cape, the future
the rising hidden smile of the ground.
The firmest, most loosened poem meets us
with the force of the landscape:
am I vain to hold my report open
while it is being written, so that I and it
know no more than a given instant realizes
—realizes? makes real, like makes water,
meaning releases loss, showing blocks,
the block is seen through
but only as a winding window at the mercy of:
I stand in a rushing tower and write
with a fluid pen on a tablet with a blank of its own—
what I remember are only my experiences.
The power of time, wider and deeper than life,
hurtles around skullracks, boulders with no recall,
orange crates in which the gagging
if divine marrow is experienced
on a plane I know of but do not know.
Flower is consumed almost faster than appears,
then *and*, dear procrastination, seeks to add
and my tablet gratefully sucks in my pen.

Time is layered, each beginning deepens
as if each leaf weighed its tree.
And thus where I stand: the weight of me?
Infant pulled through the thighs of earth,
infant emerging from the crotch of stone,
or is it stone emerging from man,
what is hardest in man, the bearing of non-bearing,
to be the finite cul-de-sac
empacted with seminal angel.

I am pinned against the base of the Southern Cross
to a position, a vane over

the tumulus of my hopeless central sleep,
here with my pots and dolls,
buried alive in my background,
in the crested fist of the specificities
I've been hung with, have chosen to wear.
The white Western heterosexual moves
no revolutionary boulders. Unlike the Césaire-man
he does not speak for the poor.
Even if he is not to be zapped,
but his boll weevils spun into porridge,
he is still a mink in the flavor—
                something that won't go down,
or that does,
    failing those stacked
        in the flues.

"navel of the moon" Mexico
first disinterred me, a black cape of flies
took off from the pineapple of my innocent heart.
This is where I'll bury my poetry,
blood gate of the moon, vale whose path
is the backs of ants, glossy
scarlet road, conveyor mirror,
this is where I always wanted to play,
aloft, on penile dream stilts,
a Gulliver-man, in collage with time.
I am the man who waded in man,
who ate man's marrow and report it is without source.
WOT TIS SOR ROW the Noh ghost intoned.
"dirty water which nevertheless cleans a pail,"
the menstruating dreamer responded.
I, Aerial, spat between the two,
I, Aerial, freed by the two,
saw a girl dying in bed, her hand a rose tree,
crawled in with her, let self
form a moat around her, a halo,
then the tree bloomed a fairy shower,
each wore a tiny fig pinafore,
each carried a sparkler as she circumambulated the tree.
"We come in self-annihilation and

the grandeur of inspiration—take the foul
deposit remaining in the cooking pot
and preserve it, for it is the source of heartage.
Come with us under this red rock
and we will show you the beast Blood Girl rides,
her broom bull, cratered, incandescent,
whose sides are open portals to the black
manta shadow on which we dreamers ebb and flow."

And we were followed into Monte Alban
by a little mongrel bitch
still nursing her litter, wagging,
our consort on that moonless night.
She rested by us as we sat, filthy, frisky,
or just sitting, and to the parking lot
where I wanted to adopt her.
Literal man, you've been adopted,
sick little dog, little Shulemite on the sward—
on her leash, power flows into your neck.
The work is everlasting conversion,
the mother is endless, the work is
everlasting conversion. Merton is electrocuted,
Vallejo's death curls a scorpion mark,
Caravaggio under a nitroglycerin sun
copulates with his own wounds.
Against the literal crucifix, set the metaphor,
burn the cross with mental pain,
it will spring forth again, a violet,
a summer storm, the bellows tear,
the ember drops through the palm.
Today I have made contact with
the immortality of error. Alchuringa,
impinge! Open your foramen magnum to me.
Between genitals and the brain
there are only exploded bridges.

[Mexico City/Oaxaca,
May/June, 1991]

FIGHTING SOCIETY

Noses
Gargoyles
Broken-jawed boxers
Not socially accepted homosexuals
Beethoven Piano Concerto playing How can you fight society?

Babies
Babycarriages Cribs
Cars, houses, garages
Country estates, huge cranes lifting
Derricks Dirigibles How can you fight society?

Hiways
Millions of miles
Asphalt huge supercarriers across Atlantic
Bombs, armies, airplanes, hydrogen explosions bullets
teeth blood broken bones arms How can you fight society?

Walt
Whitman
Would've revolved in his polar grave
and clapped his walrus hand in joy
for what I say: fighting American society

My Uncle Leo
Says I am only trying to fight society
How can you fight society? How can you fight the fighting
Society take on the whole fighting society shooting match?

[December 1956]

Dream—

We Now Present a Documentary on Greta Garbo

Camera pans to window of house under bridge. Thru kitchen venetian blinds, gauzy, a figure inside as if seen thru telephoto lenses—She (Greta) dresses in simple house clothes, or red skirt making meal for guest, dinner, at sink and sideboard. Lens clarifies, she's young and attractive and very straightforward. She seems happy. She talks to herself and laughs and chuckles, lifting her head and laughing to ceiling as she peels an onion.

Camera moves in close up—clearer and clearer—it is a movie—she talks—"You see I live here all alone and like it. I have friends, but they are my only friends, true friends. I am not unhappy. I have no needs for anything." She makes salad—a big bowl of lettuce, chives, endives, she's coring tomatoes & putting large whole tomatoes in the big bowl, a la natural style. Close-up of big tomatoes unsliced with center chonked out by knife, just top center not all the way thru.

"Man needs very little to live" Greta close-up again, superimposed on a view of bridge under which she lives. Her face and bust in dress get larger & larger & seems to atomize and dissolve into the bridge—with the giant interorganic view of her bust on the screen faded into nature, the bridge in the background.

"There is no use for all the money, all the worry, all the work, all the war. I live very simply alone. All men should forget about their great radio needs,"—her form as an immense television image fading into eternity—"Too few of us can see ourselves as things, like this bridge under which my house is sheltered—but in God's eye we are things, with our needs. And things like us have no want of a civilization. We shall survive atomic ruins because man is in mind eternal."

"Too many cars, people, too many unreal movies, too many passions clutter our lives, too much of everything—and we all work for nothing when we assemble and gather it all around us—for what? No need to do anything but just live." She's talking like Gary Snyder. Plea for simpler life, privacy. Ship's bell rings for breakfast and I wait & wake.

Probably influenced by French edition of *Secret Life of Salvador Dali* with pix.

[Fall 1956]

"Fighting Society" and "Greta Garbo Dream" were excerpted from *Journals Mid-Fifties*, edited by Gordon Ball, Harper & Row, NY (probably) 1993.

I visited Vidyadara Chogyam Trungpa in his big new house he'd moved into, I was happy, flattered he'd see me in his kitchen alone as he had once invited me to stay with him & family in his house outside Boulder on 4 Mile Canyon fourteen years ago when I'd come to give poetry reading benefits for R.M.D.C. with Gary Snyder, Nanao, Robert Bly and Rinpoche—the time he'd drunkenly put gong bowl over his head and mine whilst Gary & Robt. were declaiming themselves.

We talked, I apologized my laziness at meditation & long delay at detaching myself from the entanglements of television, photography, music, fame, poetry, teaching travelling, high blood pressure, sleepless nights, self-consciousness. He was neutral nodding his head as he puttered around the house in shirtsleeves, he was alone no one else home, probably wanted to be alone, I wanted to ask his questions, approval for my aesthetics, so I explained that I had proceeded with examination & scanning of ordinary mind—assuming that resting in that state of non-activity or better non aggression, refraining from the strain of trying consciously to focus on aspects of Eternity in palpable objects of the senses. I would come to clear steady seeing & glimpse the luminosity of things as they are, Samsaric anecdotes as Nirvanic finalities, deepening perception of what's already tangible on the street, in my mind, in bed, in dreams, in the kitchen, at Brooklyn College, visiting relatives, under the sun & clouds in the sky. This was the method I'd followed, for poetic mind, since we'd met, reconfirmed by his constant presence & my awareness of his mind, all pervading equanimities & juicy calm insight. Was this a correct path?

He was indifferent with all my explanations, and finally, when I asked directly, am I alright there, slightly irritated as if brushing me off, he said directly to me, "No" and added, "you're all wrong."

I felt naked, mentally, NO, what was I doing wasting his time asking for approval & credentials, I hadn't even had the devotional strength to confirm my presence in the N.Y. sangha with this evening's Guru Yoga assembly, I'd gone to bed guilty, lazy, exhausted, numbing out & ignoring the visible devotional community, stayed home dressed in bed unconscious under my covers in my new painted comfortable bedroom with its small shrine, and library full of Beat Literature behind the headboard; a desk at foot of the bed with my Brooklyn College class papers and notes and new William Carlos Williams collected poems sitting in corner, with a basket of pens & bottles of ink by the bedroom wall side of the desk.

He had said "NO" to my entire life proposition, I stammered, not knowing my place, self-conscious, "What had I done wrong?"

He didn't answer and I realized I had neglected the main course of action, completing my meditation prostrations & Foundation practices—I'd delayed thirteen years since 1973 seminary introduction to Vajrayana

alchemy, I still was resentful and hesitant, unfocused on devotional strength, insecure, asking alibis, I felt naked mentally, straining to impress him, get his confidence & approval, encouragement for my genius path. A fraud, flying airplanes, employing secretaries, sleeping late answering phones in mid-sleep, nervous, high blood pressure, gout, gluttony, workaholic ambition, neglecting Peter's pain, Rinpoche's own.

"What should I do?" He was silent, I realized the Answer was in the physical sitting meditation, I delayed it till his death, what was he to say, I'd missed the boat so far. I'd have to sit again, prostrate, visualize, exercise discrimination, I'd been wandering in a dream.

His apartment was on an upper floor of a country house. I followed him—he went to the side of the room where the wall was open to the sky, & looked down. Then he jumped down to the cloth & canvas pillowing on the roof of an out-building or shed-porch two stories below. I was expected to follow, he landed lightly used to the descent from the height, I was terrified, would I survive the leap to the thin canvas 20 yards below? I jumped, thumped down, we continued some desultory conversation, I didn't know what to ask, "Better prepare for Death" he once told me pointing to my harmonium black box "what would you do if you lost it?"

"Shall I go, Sir?" I asked crestfallen, "Should I leave now?"—He looked at me, slightly indifferent, round faced in clean shirt sleeves rolled up, turning to me a moment kindly, "No, stay awhile." Ellie Dorfman was coming to visit—that was hopeful, familiar, she liked me, maybe would intercede or at least get clearer explanation of his disapproval, his "No" to my life, she loves me, if he likes her he'll have to explain what's wrong with me—tho I already know, what's to say, beside overcome laziness & diffidence, oversleeping during dramatic sangha historic moments, not attending grand Kalachakra ceremonies, indifferent in his last days when I visited Halifax Hospital and touched his brow, sitting only 15 minutes at his side as his big head mouth opened wide red.

Ellie was due to visit, I wandered in the main living room, on a bureau dresser on a yellow legal size sheet of note paper he'd written a fragment of verse, "The White Horse passes the River, the cloud sinks into the snowy mountain, the Garuda circles the ice crest, Lions roar in empty mist, Tigers prowl in the basement chambers, the Dragon sleeps" or some such nonsense of cryptic instruction.

I decide I should tell him about the party in Halifax when, engaging tall thin brownskinned drunken Mr. Rongae the Tibetan to type for me or translate *Howl*, he said "I may not be competent" and I replied joyfully "Wake Rinpoche and ask his advice." Then Rongae had gotten mad at me for "insulting Rinpoche," and had to be held back by his guards, from attacking me with his hands, punching loosely at the tall friendly dumb fellow I'd sat next to on the couch, who turned out to be his companion

Vajra guard for the night. I tried to tell Vidyadara the story, but wondered why bother him, did I want his OK again, always seeking his confirmation, a nod of approval?

Throughout the awkward conversation I felt stripped of authority, like a kid who was caught doing something wrong (which I felt as kid in Eastside H.S. accused of stealing a book I'd bought from another student) and had always evaded understanding the basic score, now found out & denuded of reasons, embarrassed & helpless.

Trungpa was preparing for a trip, packing clothes for voyage, attending the curtains & furniture, inspecting the household so it be correct for kitchen daily life & visitors, he was settling down.

I stayed on in the living room, happy that Ellie was coming, she'd bring some intimacy & relief to my bare embarrassment & poverty of mind, Trungpa's disapproval. At least he said stay, when I humbly asked "Is that all? Shall I go Sir?"

"No" he'd said, "Stay a while, you can stay here, don't go yet."

[April 6, 1987 1:30 AM]

From unpublished journals, 1980s.

POEM IN THE FORM OF A SNAKE THAT BITES ITS TAIL

Oleta (Snake) River!
Heron, Manatee, Osprey
Canopy of white red &
black Mangroves
fighting for survival against
exotics introduced
by Europeans
Swamp fern covers the ground
by this Primordial Tidal
Zone,
Brown detritus under the
clear water
feeds animals and trees in
high and low tides
pulled by the moon,
cycles of lunar
reproduction following
waters flowing
in and out the
Intracoastal waterway—
Barracuda come
in with the tides
Heron we'll see
Brazilian pepper
& Malalucca
from Australia
brought in by Mr. Gifford
first Doctor
of Tropical Agriculture
Malucca
to dry out the swamps
& make truck farms
to feed the Northeast 1900—
Dade County
tomatoes & cabbage today—

Then real estate won
out, that saved the
swamp
water
supply
This forest by Oleta River a tiny
area untouched
half a million
years—
Interconnected to the
coral reefs
(as nutrient rich protective
soup for fish
spawning)
with a rubber tire, mucous—
soaked in the ooze
Red mangrove
seedlings growing on inland skirts
at water edge
roots like spindly
buttresses

First Indians Tequesta
for 10-25,000 years—
left behind shell
tools
to make dugouts
Mikisuki and Seminole
were Creek Indians forced down
from North Carolina
by Sen. Jesse Helms
then driven inland from
Northern Florida
by the Army
—Indian middens
attest 100
years' occupation

The Seminole
more warlike then
the innocent
Tequestas

Quiet in a canoe
Train whistle West
& airplane above
cottony clouds
in blue afternoon

Seminole and Mikisuki
accepted
runaway slaves
got in trouble with
the whites—
Abraham the Runaway showed Chief Osceola
Guerilla gunpowder—
Defied the US Army—
Govt. fought 2 wars
against them—
first 1820 Andrew Jackson
fought in Florida
pushed Indians south
Second Seminole war
transported 2,000
Indians to Oklahoma
around 1840, the Trail of Tears
—200 managed to
escape into swamp
where white man had
yet no use for
the land

Indians
from before Columbus
& runaway slaves
Strange & perpetual
alliance

Otherwise we're all exotics
like the Brazilian Pepper
and Australian Pine

A brown heron
flaps along the
green surface
to stand sentinel
on a green lawn
past the big rubber
tree
beak pointed out—
tall stalky legs
rising hallway
heavy slow
on long wings
the height of the big
ficus' leafy
umbrella whose
thready prop roots hang
over the concrete
bank down to the brackish
water surface
Kids & crows' voices
(crows here for the
season)

Water filled the
coral, ojus,
limestone
a product trucked
out since
the railroad came down
turn of the century

Trains a mile long
from rockpits now
at the edge of
the Everglades

Mikisuki Indians now hold
cultural events
Steve & Billy Tiger
painter & musician

Seminoles more commercially
oriented, invented Bingo on
the reservation,
On land they control
untax'd cigarettes

A local issue
ecological!
We depend on Everglades
for water to
sustain our days—
Most of the body is
made up of water—
3-4 days without water
we die—
Everglades filters the
water Dade Broward
& Palm Beach County
drink—
(Tricounty fresh
water—)

But Brazilian Pepper Seeds
explode
and cause mumbo jumbo
growth at
waterside.

Exotic Malalucca trees—?
The developers like it
(it's cheap)
but they drink up water & their
flowers cause allergies
to Rochelle—

Red Mangrove
stains the water
properly its own color

Are hyperindustrial White folks
exotics to the planet now?

Here comes a duck
that flies sings & runs
but doesn't do any
of them well
"El pato vuela, canta
y corre, pero
ninguno de las tres
los hace bien."

Big yellow hibiscus faces
with red noses—
Venetian sailors
brought
venereal disease
to New World
now Millennial events
speed up?

Get off fossil fuels
for transport
Get off oil addition
Plastics could be
recyclable

Zero Growth regenerative
recycling as for
thousands of years
with the Tequesta
Get off this disposable
binge—

& water! dont mess
up the Oleta river Dont
play with the big Snake

Can live without air
8 minutes
Can live without water
2-4 days
can live without food
40-50 days—
Survive, clean up our
air
Clean up water
Grow enuf food to
keep everybody
alive

Instructors: any
indigenous populations

Indians, Africans,
Tibetans, Bedouins
Laplanders—
Chernobyl began
the question—
How much can the
Government lie?
(Miami Herald pervasive
and controlling—)

Locally the Seminoles may
be the Gurus.

[11/16/90]

New volume of poems, 1986–1992 (in preparation).

MIND WRITING SLOGANS

"First thought is best in Art, second in other matters."
—William Blake

I. GROUND

1. "First Thought, Best Thought"—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
2. "The Mind must be loose"—John Adams
3. "One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception"—Charles Olson
   "Projective Verse"
4. Surprise Mind
5. "Magic is the total delight (appreciation) of chance"—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
6. "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes."—Walt Whitman
7. ". . .What quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature?. . .Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."—John Keats
8. "Form is never more than an extension of content."—Robert Creeley/Charles Olson
9. Ordinary Mind includes eternal perceptions—A.G.
10. Notice what you notice—A.G.
11. Catch yourself thinking—A.G.
12. Observe what's vivid—A.G.
13. Vividness is self-selecting—A.G.
14. "Spots of Time"—William Wordsworth
15. If we don't show anyone we're free to write anything—A.G.
16. How do we talk to ourselves at night in the dark? "Each on his bed spoke to himself alone, making no sound."—Charles Reznikoff

II. PATH (Method)

17. "No ideas but in things. No ideas but in the Facts." ("Give me a for instance"), ("Show not tell")—William Carlos Williams
18. "Close to the nose."—W. C. Williams; "Sight is where the eye hits."—Louis Zukofsky
19. "Clamp the mind down on objects."—William Carlos Williams
20. "Direct treatment of the (thing or) object."—Ezra Pound/1912
21. "Presentation, not reference."—Ezra Pound
22. "The Natural object is always the adequate symbol."—Ezra Pound
23. "Things are symbols of themselves."—Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
24. "Details are the Life of prose."—Jack Kerouac

25. "Labor well the minute particulars, take care of the little ones
He who would do good for another must do it in minute
[particulars
General Good is the plea of the Scoundrel Hypocrite and
[Flatterer
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized
[particulars"—William Blake
26. "And being old she put a skin/on everything she said."—W. B. Yeats
27. "Don't stop to think of words but to see the picture better."—Jack Kerouac
28. "My writing is a picture of the mind moving."—Philip Whalen
29. Maximum information, minimum number of syllables.—A.G.
30. Pound's advice re: Imagism:
    A) "Direct Treatment of the thing"
    B) "Economy of Words" (no superfluous words)
    C) "Compose in sequence of musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome"
31. "Follow the tone leading of the vowels."—Ezra Pound
32. ". . . An attempt to approximate classical qualitative meters. . ." —Ezra Pound
33. Syntax condensed, sound is solid.—A.G.
34. Intense fragments of spoken idiom, best.—A.G.
35. Savor vowels, appreciate consonants.—A.G.
36. "Only Emotion Objectified endures."—Louis Zukofsky

III. FRUITION

37. Spiritus = Breathing = Inspiration = Unobstructed Breath
38. *"The Emperor joins heaven and earth."*
    Man joins heaven and earth
    Speech joins mind and body, viz.:
    Thoughts and words come from mind,
    Impalpable.
    They ride out into space
    on the physical breath,
    coming from the body
    Thus word conjoins or synchronizes
    or connects mind and body—
    Thus speech as sacred connection of mind and body
    Thus speech as Emperor of Phenomenal World
    Thus speech as Imperial Proclamation
    Poetry as Proclamation
    From Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche *Shambhala*

39. Characteristics of Poetic majesty:
    A) Meek or humble—Ordinary mind
    B) Sparky or vivid—Surprise mind
    C) Outrageous or "crazy"—Wildness of mind, jumpcut, dissociation. Gaps. Collage, montage. Music video, discontinuity. Raw thought, scary sex death boredom thought.
    D) Inscrutable—No reductive or linear abstract bounded thought. Unpredictability, "unborn" yet appearing instantaneously: i.e. "First thought, best thought."
40. "The unspeakable visions of the individual."—Jack Kerouac
41. Needn't be genius for production of artifact; amateur effort homemade OK, as mind training in being present knowing your mind, appreciating your own mind, and others', i.e. the 10,000 things of the world.
42. Subject is known by what she sees.—A.G.
43. Others can measure their visions by what we see.—A.G.
44. Candor ends paranoia.—A.G.
45. "Make it New"—Ezra Pound
46. Fruition: "To diminish the mass of human and sentient suffering."—Gelek Rinpoche

[7/92]

Composed for July 1992 Naropa Institute poetics summer students.

PERIODIC REMAINDERS: SIX POETS

NORMA COLE
from ROSETTA

§ it was the same pattern: the shower
of rain, appearance of ravens, description
of the oasis

§ verbs of posture, verbs of spending time

§ a future expressing the will or
intent of the subject 'I will do it'

§ she said, after the war had finished

§ market-minded; verbs of speaking
making noise and arguing

§ 'look' for 'see'

§ verbs of bringing

§ following but not gone

§ reported speech with
periodic remainders

§ body in glacier

§ off the sea like confetti

"Blessed are the forgetful" we did
love that place. speculate. what other
work could mirrors be doing? I remind you
of our childhood together. and of
the pick-axe of examination. you don't
want *that* to be
stranger. tell you
the waiting

§ 'arrest and movement'

§ there was talk of an empty city

§ stuck together

§ with words or sister city

§ made a clear pattern of abuse

§ turrets painted by squadron

§ the mast's game

§ ballast of gravel, sand or stone

§ the stone itself, soothing

§ impossibility

work done on the rock stood or fell at the
mouth then was written, *carved*

notched, grooved. . . .

"Broken up by rocks"
the waterfall could not measure up
as if they're
looking right at me. ghost
beauty
added four parapets

lost objects (gathering)
in the Empty Quarter

'whose work' would later
throw him
in which that gathering

§ ear-splitting whistle
undeciphered *but* proof
of their presence. so he

§ deciphered on the level

§ *Courier de l'Egypte*
le 29 fructidor, VII° année
de la République

§ the most important of
these 'daughters of Tyre'

§ way, path, groove, were those
signs (mysterious) in their hair

. . .wave theory of light. . .the bumpy treatise. . .we are
. . .losing. . .linear ramblings, floors. . .
its calm flatness. . .
the broadness and shallowness. . .

Moving anxiety
for the reality
moving without you. again
wrapping the proscribed
image in sheets
between
grateful reproductions

§ dreaming from the

§ signifying landscape X names
of the dead

§ formed from the taking of a country

§ wreckage and simple understanding

§ one day 'woke up' and
just knew how to do it

§ how these things come into being
and *that they do*

One translation says
Osiris says
but the other, earlier one says
The life of things
after the defeat of Typhon
the moisture of nature
through the vigilance of Anubis

The names were surrounded.

the play of color
cloth against the body
against whistled monody
recorded
body against

They used the four-spoked wheel.

§ restless

§ apparently it will be
filled with glowing
shadowy blanks

§ change going through to
experience

§ around to approx.

§ 'say' to 'read'

. . .covered. . .all. . .residues. . .over. . .a
ban on it. . .insoluble. . .surround. . .

no interest or
, believed
it so

posted
on the installment

They were
pretending
reason from understanding
Of the necessity
of the world

§ our city has done that and this

§ irritation has returned

§ not to speak of drawing parallels, are not always
taking the context or implications into hand

§ no longer
dreams blind

§ build these things and paint them

§ brightly

Nothing of the past is in these. . .pictures
stations of the plague. . .

on a silver tray you also left your card

lazy and erased
elevated by foldings
in three

genealogy of cities, Carthage
daughter of Tyre

to place up
lacing vocabulary of action
places direction with brackish water
wind called splitter or cleaver
refusing to let the supply ship dock

AARON SHURIN
A DOOR

Once—I move back in time—caught within a circle—I can be like some traveler after the vestiges—ageing planet—the street was not just a thoroughfare, it was a place where people lived. A journey occurs in the social hierarchy between house and bush. Each mound glistening through the grass, set among loose stones, almost vertical cliffs. . .

Her gown pinches her waist to represent a crescent moon. Eyelids between her breasts, dropping down the mountains. She inspects nets made of hairs—crackles under the sound of sparks—walls inlaid with glass winds, we'd stare at the sun. . .

Someone did not follow him into the kitchen, though I adored vigorous beauty. That it looked as if it would crack with scintillated youth—us their object—he watched, generated in the darkness by one hand, to our swarming garments part of us a third person—we let them fall—what is called triumph—making both our shame and our glory for a long time in a room. Smiling with sweat, of whose virtue we partook. . .

She starts towards the bedroom, but doesn't move—breeze comes up with two drinks, looking for Johnny. Here you are beautiful, as he starts past the twin beds. He holds onto him throws her arms around his neck through the door. . .

I wonder how at one time we are our own lives and a shadow, the steep hillside to a saucerlike plain to a fortified river. The blood smell upon your face is honey to stinging bees. Sitting on a stool in the red light of sunset he pointed to another stool. He's eaten his tongue, he must listen to rumors playing on the word. . .

And we got to talking plucking at his tweed sleeve—grossed seven grand with that puzzled grin—took the elevator upstairs and sat down again. I put my head down against sandwiches and apple pie. It wasn't like anything, it wasn't like real poetry. . .

The house filled with poppyseed rolls I baked myself scraps of meat, hiccups or headaches. Two kids have long tongues and go home in the evening. I took my bread—the moon started to pound through the cracks—each tiny bone came nearer—as though I had dropped from the roof—on her white lips a smile. You might accumulate a bucket. . .

And the veiling wind draws water into the clouds. It was ocean above the waters. They sprinkled their foreheads, with your mother's bones behind you. They covered their heads—their hardness—out of the quiver of this memory my boy came down causing love all the way—through the hiding places—who is your curious charm. . .

We've had chestnut trees and candles—in splinters on a mirror—and will hurl itself at the period blossoms to evoke the scorching in progress. The wrinkled cherries swoon away, a sky in possession behind the inflated foreground. The creamy emptiness resembling a road, a conversation, a dozen homonyms, a nightbird cries in broad daylight, abandoning moderation. . .

We had only to stretch our hands to establish contact with the landscape. It's the tenderest hue of uncertain fragility—brown and pink against the ravages of emerald and white. I tramped over the ground—conveyed to me by its fragrance, not its shapes—in which the most telling posture was the opposite direction, uneven, a series of sharp tiers clinging to the coastal wall. He closes it with one key, its paradisal state providing fuel for crucibles. . .

A seductive man confesses to understanding nothing about pleasure. I'm not a woman but a world. Your chastity would walk into an olive grove, demanding sacrifice—bend down to receive a certain vertigo—at which your hand fill my thirst aimed at moving his tender wounds. One received an order, was converted through an apparition, head still bowed. . .

I call it a generative organ—the luminosity of which would have hatched one's body—breaks through into moral inquiry—he gets an erection. Our gestures grew fainter, whether human or material—my mother's face preserve within me the idea of myself—which took on proportion and power by the forces which came charging into her. After rubbing his hands he stopped by the community kitchen, passed the docks, wrapped in a woolen cape, knew equivocal joy, betrayal was already forming. . .

People start looking for their coats; voices murmuring, she stands looking around her. A bowl of flowers seems to be listening. Elaborate vanity puts

a cigarette in his mouth. Never taking eyes from the match, mixing herself a drink, sits down in a chair near Johnny. She wrenches his eyes around that glass and drains it. Hard breathing—open the French doors—on his back smoking, a radio turned up loud in the next apartment. . .

He wanted to cut his message into the tablets of my mind, looked blank but knew my movements well. The night was clear in the reeds. It was thought, it was not a piece of wood. I saw a totally fabulous person appear over the top of the wall. I could tell from the closed eyes this creature had pierced the soft parts of his brain—searching for the circumstances of great shoulders—I might love a warrior, forged far away like that. . .

Or the time in school I saw an angel but couldn't get possession of what the sum was—the show, I mean—there wasn't a fraction of an instant—standing near the curb head thrown back, evaluating a smile. My stomach ran for the garage. Her face from the film was traveling in front of it. The spray seemed to catch fire. I fumbled along the lights, crying and laughing. . .

Outside the frost startled the frozen earth, a young boy happens to ask for particular stories. The same story you told before, by the washtub at our first encounter, radiant with intrigue. The young men—one summer—the corn—birds with human voices—a gentleman with silver shoes—we had no money. The sky seemed large, public, embroidered with leaves; women crowded to the windows; the roof was covered with green moss. . .

He has her—the other in terror—but gave her no rest. He placed his hand as if they still were limbs and kissed the foamy waters. Make some happy burning bed at your side. How she said "no" to change her form while he sighed, the echo of a sigh made slumber deeper in those eyes. The seed swelled up, stretched both hands to heaven, columns the overarching skies, trembled to this high dwelling to see the world so far below me. . .

The tenacity, the ingenuity, shuttered each night, open together. The curly children flinging themselves beside themselves. The little chair—a connoisseur—remained in his grip. A goose to overcome the dragon, and mouth the flower of a clear ornate attention. At the zenith of its circulation visible in the face. Persimmons beside his place at table, a tingling sprig of mint between the sheets. . .

Be objects of contemplation, instruments of reflection. The original layout trails through demolitions, new building fever. Steamy atmosphere in

oblique lines—between the pale yellow clouds in progress to Florencio de Abreu—were falling mango trees along the southwest outskirts—muddy torrents for the mud-walled pavilions—confronted each other a jumble of mammals established on these banksto carry a motor road. Functions were fulfilled so that these paradoxes might appear in public—arm raised in salute to suggest period grandeur, rose windows. . .

Did he receive the rampaging dogma allowed us? With lifted finger he pushes at the upper extremity. A woman sobs in silence against a pillar. I was falling asleep to the sound of the streets around his neck—it was indescribable, ecstatic in vibrating space—streaks revolved in front of my eyes, a man under a figtree at a turning in the road. How you scream when my vigorous strokes have been opened to you! The skin stretched on the ground under their tunics. Blue veils bow down around a rose-strewn bed. Waving her naked elbows the constellations shiver. Coming and going—heart of the uproar—beating their hands in time—we lived in this street of the cutting edges, claimed by inscriptions, the superhuman beauty of a stone statue. . .

I watched their waltz—it seemed the invisibility became total—wedded by lovers' exchange to all the injunctions of uniform and veil. I was being mastered by a strapping body aware of his loneliness—fierce and pure—like a falcon inside mycobra neck. His solid thighs seemed heavier. Sailors trembled about the sun, secretly engaged. Observed by a tall blond—my glance was between his lips, spit in his mouth—the resewn pink scar fluid along the dangerous shores, waiting for me in darkest alley of the neighborhood. He led me the very odor of night. At the foot of the stairs these words which were too sweet, contained the sleep of a child against his body. . .

His face fills up with Johnny, oblivious to his surroundings. Rain outside, she snaps her fingers leaving the door open. Leather jacket at the window, he moves away, taps himself on the chest—the direction in which she pointed—one long swallow—a small hotel—passing a large framed photo of a girl with lazy eyes. He's flailing with his arms, comes up with thumb extended—her very shaky legs give way—asking you to use it—squeeze a couple of steps forward into the staring room. In a tall vase silence has trapped him—pushed around in a wet bungalow that rises to crescendo. . .

Opener of the roads, I was visiting in that map he drew on the ashes. It was a spot among intervals—sloping bottom between these chambers—except for the outstretched arms. Debris encompassed the city I'd conceived but

left unuttered. I suppose our minds wouldn't come out of the pod. And the sound of wings passing over us—sucking noises torn out of the night—through the morass of this home which grew larger and larger, where a few false steps acquainted with secrets were close on their heels. My little baby striding toward me in moonlight—who was already high on his watery knees, praying aloud as usual. . .

She'd duck her head and look the other way. Her hair bent over my black and blue hand—receiving sympathy. Buffing her half-witted fingernails into the air and catching them in his mouth. Some bird which you and I wouldn't touch batted the breeze around—it's a disappearance, a gesture of good faith—into the rearview mirror where I left him, hands on his hips. I'd give her the exact address—it's someone else, it's another woman—in her made-over clothes pulling different ways—a creamery and a centrifuge—make me an offer—in a plain black dress that began to ache from her weight. . .

As in the saying, "Like father, like son," the houses were not home. She devoured with red hair and green eyes the colored scraps of winter, afraid of her anger, was almost forgotten, reappeared in short skirts, freckled by beads and wolves' teeth. Warm nights woke the town—roasted sponge cakes and onion bread. Even the willow branches were decorated—young girls in a scissor dance—a bridesmaid scouring the sky for sunrise. She walked as though the powers of darkness were pious men and women. Her hair was a wilderness consecrated to me. Sitting up in a bed that resembled the heralding distance. . .

You see my face: a punishment, not a favor. Why put those pleading arms around me? The driver doesn't know where to turn the reigns—plunging animals—stunned and dazzled over infinite acres. She saw the others and felt secure. No one can see us here, this pool is holy. Her hands curved inwards, too dangerous for her to plead with. The boy, seeking the game, had spread his nets upon his mother—she stood still unmoving eyes—her shining star being my wounds—he gave her back her human features, almost on tip toe over the sand. And his passion blazed up to pull the cloak from my shoulders—rising breasts—airborne—as though the sight of shining men were driven deeper into the sky. . .

We are left undisturbed in the heated disorder appropriate to private things. It's all decorated with multicolored trajectory like a hummingbird. My correspondent quenched its thirst at good brandy—an article of faith—I begged for a swallow—he shaped me pellets of breadcrumbs moist with jasmine water. I can only interpret it graphologically, arabesque, instruc-

tive. They bring me their strange odor—hunting anecdotes that bristle with dangers—to put on a spread for us: still-bubbling cream, featherbed, illustrated book. I haven't given them away, I shall invoke sonority, a shape. . .

With a paraphrase indistinguishable from the local porcelain bowls. A kind of latticework flour sieve made from split bamboos, transforming, plaiting, creating a current of air to produce a collection of specimens. You could examine the towns like a botanist examines plants; one direction expressing order, the other, magic. I was looking at men and women in airless cubicles—squatting in dim light of single bulb—they showered sarcastic remarks on me—the anthropologist—to underline their smiles—making a transposition to the manufacture of a laugh, devoid of mystery and uninspired by faith. We cross by plane to a single theme: the desert. The tracery of crystals shade off into trampled grey—a continuous surface threadbare by use—each shimmering impregnated, eggs of the delta. The tone of a beggar lowering the voice on the last syllable, as if he were saying "Why don't you do something to cancel out the element of cause and effect in the physical world?" Or squat down to urinate, nostalgically, in a state of equilibrium. . .

Dragging him along a dark stairway, the man whispers in his ear, bare of furniture. Light rays streaming on the walls, they talk about their families, standing in parallel lines with swaying bodies. That man was so beautiful it precipitated revenge. It passes slowly, as if a circle of great weight slipped from his hand. They surround him, console him, in the taut air on ropes. In the opposite cage, in continuous movement, he thinks he can feel their teeth. To have meetings with our brothers, our husbands, would take a door to the blood-stained bushes—blackened sponge—burying themselves in the multiplied soil—I once lived in that tree behind me—letting the world breathe out with both nostrils, in which I had shut my senses. The flowers of his face have become insensitive to light. I made a breeze in weakness—tell me where I can find Osiris—drank the panting river, green, vaporish, leaning on his right arm, overflowing. . .

He helped me, surrounded the secrecy of our first night. Beneath my fingers its heat—my whore—was born. His gestures powder him with a buttery softness—I leave a room on tip toe—excited by his blue trousers, laying my cheek against the keyhole in exile. One night he walked near me; I couldn't keep my hand from flapping his wing. I am hurt by a physical ailment more secret than poverty, obedient to the nature of that particular polished steel, his fingernail. He was imagining himself in armor grease, penetrating his petrified shell. The loveliest infanta on his right arm,

desiring abjection enough to be brilliant in his shadow. Laid out on a chair his jacket and shirt seemed inevitable. The procession started from the Ramblas de Las Flores at sunrise. I knew my place was one of them—their extravagant gestures—flowers down in a spangled skirt still remembered with stunning modesty. My shaken voice—it hides a sharper, more dangerous element—smouldered within me, formulated a terrible glare in the middle of mantilla and fan. I had never ceased to be silhouetted by the setting sun. . .

And if she was in a bar she just left disappointed, tears it up into little pieces too complicated for an ashtray. Glassy-eyed walks out to call it a day. Her head and shoulders on the wheel, staring straight before her. One of the bridges, spray of the tires, Johnny just looks at her. Strangers have friends like this. I guess I can learn to forget him. The highway lights didn't have any dinner, blindly past it. Steps are heard receding in a small coast town. The blinds are drawn, the radio is louder. She smiles in the direction of the chair in which Johnny sat, outstretched hand towards the telephone. Cars surf along the highway—people glassed in—wearing a scarf over her head, staring at her speechless glasses. I'm following a reason after the rain—cruise anywhere listening—the last passenger tight and determined and begin to get interested in restless conversation. "Who do you want to see first?"—He speaks without looking up—"and how long have you known him. . ."

We spent days at that place to allow the gases for such a digestion. The effects of his past debauchery could out-tire me. On our way I pointed to the edge of the pyre—two companions in a hole—cut to the irreducible minimum—in which case he might find himself by a process of devolution, missing. We were a curious procession that bordered the great artificial river, deep in the bowels of people who understood this swamp language. Again and again we lost the trail, separated from each other by high fragments—scattered a little body of men in that immensity—over trackless water, worn out away from home by the promise of pattern in the wilderness. I stared about me a flying light for a guide. It was as though a voice points to the east, whose temper in command here is discipline without law. Our state would have been different at its entrance. I had mapped out his reasons; the reasons were curiosity. We were creeping towards the spot of enormous advantages. . .

Another showman put in a call to the city. Shaking hands and slapping backs down the street like he was selling tickets. I couldn't afford sentiment among the businessmen. He knocks down a big overgrown tomorrow to keep close watch on a dozen females. Across the street he looked out and

saw me—made me feel like backward and forward was much too late—his mudhole eyes didn't have to move, lying around collecting dust. It started to rain a few happy drops: just part of theframework. Pieces chasing around a canvas during the ceremony to run things. When we passed along the side of the road their heads pulled up for the funeral. I sat down, stood up, shook the raining hell out of their hands. There was a rasping sound and the whole house rumbled. She folded my arms over the other—that's what made you cold—too late to change because we weren't the same people anymore—though you're all I have, you're mine now, splashing the windows. . .

Washing his hands the town was unrecognizable. The mud-splashed girls were grey and wrinkled. Monuments in the story brought their epilogues; it won't be held against him. A bride was led before his windows: she alone survived. It was summer air for charitable purposes. She started measuring the streets with silver combs, wearing shoes with pointy toes, filled bathtubs with lobsters to sprinkle the community with anything. Witnesses sat comfortably on a chair and sucked candy. From memorial candles the flames sputter—a moth wandering past midnight—you have to keep moving—the burden was mine to the reading table—of flesh and bones in the cleansing room—because a stranger can take the place of a person—size me up in their skins, vagabond—I tested her nostrils, red cheeks, pouring spine with arms outspread, trying to look in her face while my bed kept twisting and turning. If you're destined to live in circles her dresses were there. . .

Whoever you are with coaxing gestures that boulder will talk, tempted for information. It was a festival—grace of the procession—outshining the other wheeling stars, smoothing his hair to wakefulness. Over the great muscles of grass bringing flowers, clinging to the wind. Those people coming behind kissed the unknown fields and mountain—made a low archway for the long head, writhing loops—wild with veins as he sprays another color, pressing under that weight—into a pool of the woods while she was bathing there. The only speech he has is not his own. Fear argues while he hesitates—cut through the mountains—both sides said nothing, secretly rejoicing—I must find the girl herself with reason, under cover of the yellow cloud. Full of the slang of rage he enters her mortal body; in that mating sewed up in his cradle—struck from each other struck them apart, embraced and ravished by the strangeness of his infatuation. Both sought his love; neither could touch him. . .

The little jewel and I have waited under the colored sphere. Of crumpled souvenirs what he alone held—ritual possessions—with tassels, without

handles, a bunch of curls: the essentials. The sky turns the double curtain, enters my room. A little boy plays with difficult words so that she bursts her skin. A piece of paper compiled a list which demanded a burning refrain. We savored it, drank it, burnished it in the shadow—in the masterless house endowed with morning severity. Ripen the slice of cake under strawberry light, gourmandizing—it wasn't difficult to believe in France in maturity. Our friendship attacks with gratitude her practical vantage point, striped with reverence. Unformulated the fragment that melted away—signs of a phenomenon—face to face, exhaled at the table. Fresh parsley with lemon made a gesture of withdrawal. She followed the colored trajectories, strewn around each breath. Blue paper, immaterial, with its great slow eyes. . .

But in the line on the hill he built a house the other day—up on the threshold, rub it between one's fingers. The name is recorded for distribution under the honorific title: Workbench—hammer on the black cloth—polishing it with a piece of glass—beyond the pine woods where the dusty sun danced in corners with distant gold—in his own house, Jerusalem, a dot in a book. Behind this layer another layer—books spilled on the floor—filtering in through cracks threads of golden bees, angels' sailboats. The overgrown pear tree completely white—silence with moss when no breeze blew—he trailed into late summer, door swinging. He kissed his mother a hissing kiss, and his father ran after him; he kissed his father's falling hand, ringing in his ears. Down the narrow corridor were sons and daughters—it was broad daylight—green flames from the silverware, red from the wine glasses—spinning around the table, miles away. He stretched out along the mound, a profusion of apple trees threw themselves down on the ground, blossoming and burning. He washed his hands, entered the house with reserve. In the whirling substance the floor remained—without looking up he opened one of the shutters—I'm here—and walked in the door. A half-filled glass was on the table. His small hands trembled as the food was served. . .

AUGUST

Permit me to borrow from you.
I force breath through my closed fingers,

a part of reception.
A matter of belief

rings my tail

as I wag it.

Allow me to bite through

my lack of employment

Waves across your desk.

I have two ears

or teeth.

I've reduced this all

—that on the cilia I tread—

the matched stripes of my belly

as I bend backward.

I copy the empty cell
as part of those dual feet

that crook
behind me.

NIGHTWORKS

What I was I should refute
as crossword
or crosshatch

A new habit of literalism,
very sweet in
fragrance, irrelevance,
idolatry

But a metaphor of God
in a star of four arms

The fins folded back
pouring wine in

the very passage of time
which irritates skin
I've stared at too long
at its stub as it's perfumed me

PENDANT

Catching a glimpse of his afterness
This is not the one
but a net spread
in the sight of a bird

made a map

Upended fish
in whose wisdom an avian mouth

Fruitful aimlessness
were shields floating from their native
circle

The fin of him, his turtled grasp

Vain knees and shoulder blades
of superscription

At this stripe revolved listening and
retracted

His sudden absorption
Softening of countenance
Mother's torah
omits prologue

WHEN THAT

That was a stranger,
God, a moth
leaping over itself

Sugar meeting between molars
One horned
One with ears

One hart called Broad Places
another
Room

that was a ladder set up on the earth jumping
pouring oil on a stone pillow

MARCH

> It is not nothing but something; yet it is something on the edge of nothing, bordering it and menaced by it, and having no power of itself to overcome the danger.
> —Karl Barth

Three fish in a cradle hurled
to that trickling

foreknown by virtue of its rejection

Three benign cells
finned and grotesque

Crosshatch, grill, and diamond
request existence

Laid out to dry in tumult
Double
hexahemeron

Gills sent into createdness
the structure of the world

KEVIN MAGEE
from TEDIUM DRUM, PART III

What exactly the date was is not what was thought about is held unabated, unthought. One page might include a list of arbitrary, they would have to be arbitrary, unexamined verbal impulses, social bits of language. There are no more proverbs. Every night a crowd milling, doing the talking, the room not even a room with four walls and a fire escape. We followed them around with great disappointment and even greater concern, the news of the decision to restrict directly looking forward to this date in view of the blows from the batons and news of the roving begin to compose I admired his composure enormous moral authority liable to not exactly justice but my survival. When there is nothing in front of you there can be nothing inside you, the thought disappears and all that is left is this ghost of the matter in my head, the ghost of the matter instead. It was a saying of ours, a saying of ours for years. We may be goats, but we have our rights.

The sound came in waves, wave of liquid lapping, lap. Insatiable. Trajectory of daylight, warmth, heat, dazzle and beam bright agitated bouts of energy, integument of purpose, swathed. Increments. Clemency. Yes, you are forgiven, you may go free. The sign of election, and just when they least expected it, the child took the clock apart. The child broke the clock. The heat curls the paper, melts the flowers. Writing carving its course in the clay over

time. Hard look of the sexual disavowed, disallow, importunate in nothing but in Thee. Noon, the exquisite hour. The heat releases smells. Write with your hat off, it is that hot. Does the body smell because the air is moist, or is it the sudden shifts in temperature? She wept at the wedded tendril of the dog's entrails. The dog was dead and decomposing. The absurdity of the bicyclist at Balbec. The miracle of photosynthesis.

The sky is perfect today, just like yesterday, a virus. The worms lift their weary heads. They have been digging all day and the dirt disgusts them. At times it seems as though they cannot breathe. Candelabra. Embrasure. The sun shines on the page. Hagiography, socio-souciant. The bother of bay leaves. The big dumb dogs bark and bark at their boredom of barking. They are not theatrical. Trickle. Now what is left. What is there than for. Anywhere what had been, was, or was it—why not. Why not won't what, what then. Redact. With or without. A shout. The mere thought. Is that what it was and if it were was that how it is, now? Withering. The motor of. There is nothing more to add, nothing to be said for: kiln, milk. Possibly the edge or contour, expectorate or rind. The clay was fired. Per perhaps pillow. Bear nor got that right or wrong. Stipulate field. The full inside spread of a folded page. The binding is panel-stamped brown leather over boards. Parchment fragments from an unidentified manuscript serve as filling for the spine.

Proof of the authenticity of the narrative therein contained. It goes on. They go on. Culpable plan or plum pear briar nape fringe erratic verity height carry calumny, corollary, thorn. The thought occurs that it was this and not that, then, not the cause but an appropriated moment and the capacity to consist. He carried the candle into the room. The dog barks and someone's hammer nearby pulls nails out of a board. It casts a pall. Put on a pair of shoes and a sweater. Resolution of the dichotomy put forward by the Prague school. Antecedent exigency. The fence is falling down. The signified *ox* has as its signifier b-o-f on one side of the border and o-k-s on the other. When confronted with this ox-in-itself called by two different names in France and Germany nobody appeared to be prepared to say, with Giosne Carducci, *T'amo, o pio bove.* This much deprecated example of boeuf-Ochs is elementary and as such far from definitive, but to reject it one would have to claim that the equation boeuf-Ochs is just as absurd as, for example, boeuf-Buchanan.

It is noon. The siren has sounded. Masticate was the word I was looking for earlier. Probably some memory of Nietzsche's *Use and Abuse of History*, the placid beast without memory in the opening pages. In Stevens history is a part of nature is subsumed by nature it belongs—takes place in or takes force from—the natural order. This is a consolation for him as it allows him not to think in a certain (dangerous) direction. The light is no longer in front the light is behind, the source of the light is the sun going down, a compilation, chronicle or record, paucity of documents, no memory of the Party, factory, strike, cops, trial, prison—another life, it happened to someone else, I wasn't there, that wasn't me, who have no memory. Dropping with sleep, too tired to read, history hard to come by. Humility of an occupation where one must be wary as to

whether to add this or that comma. My three years experience in the Custom-house, P.P., clerk of this parish. She exists in the experience of her negation. How a large portion of the following pages came into my possession. A child is being tortured in the adjoining room.

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MICHAEL PALMER
THE LEONARDO IMPROVISATIONS

1

Can the
two be

told the
two bodies

be told
apart be

told to
part can

the two
be drawn

the two
be drawn

apart

Note: these poems were part of a collaboration with the Italian painter Sandro Chia and were first published in a limited edition by Edizioni della Bezuga as *Improvvisazioni su Leonardo.*

2

What of the words reversed,
words meant

for mirrors, words lost, voices
heard, mirrors

which return. What of the
body there,

the body which turns, the
face which

returns the gaze. What of
the backward

book, the hidden book, the
waves of

bent light in ascending air.
What possible

eye requires such blank signs.
What worlds

appear as more than real
reflected there.

3

First write of all water
in each of its motions

Then eddies of air
in the form of bell towers

Then a book of the building of cities
end the burning of cities,

book of the winged man and the hanged man,
book of miter and argonaut, nautilus,

double helix of the twin stair,
book of the moon as mirror

and words made of mirrors,
book of the body and its memory,

body as a measure and body as a question,
book which explains our shadows,

book of the ram's horn lute and the monochord,
the intervals of light along its string,

book of the trace and book of the fragment,
book of the earth split in half

4

The measure of the actual body
is the measure

of the imaginary body
The body is encircled—

a circle is drawn—
circle that is impossible

around an actual body
body which tastes of salt

and does not exist
within the perfect circle

it fashions around itself
and whose circumference it touches

with the tips of the fingers outstretched
and the soles of the feet at rest

The body is framed by mirrored words
It is not visible in the mirror

The circle and the body meet
on the plane of the imaginary page

5

Curl of leaf and wave
Curve of neck and thigh

As much the unseen
as the visible

As much what has disappeared
as what remains

EMMANUEL HOCQUARD
from THEORY OF TABLES

(Tr. from the French by Michael Palmer)

40

A peacock fans its tail
pivots around

A peahen is white
is asleep beneath a tree
doesn't watch

The books don't arrive back from the sea
someone has tracked a shadow

The shadow is his own

You threw me twelve baby chicks
across the tablecloth

I look at the Sea of Straw
I am as big as what I see
I see a bed in a mirror

This mirror used to be four

41

You say now

Now means what happens
hasn't happened won't happen

Means a surface

One surface, another
another surface
not a book not a beginning

The figures don't say before

42

Grammar says something
arrives after a before
and before an after

It says a new sentence
is possible
someone is not alone

She or he
you and I

Grammar says: to search for a shadow

43

Dear you, what
I'm writing (to you) isn't personal

Means someone
another someone

The pronouns are traded
change hands

Dear Claude, that
belongs to you
but this book is for no one

I put my books in your hands
someone = his gaze

Not someone

44

Seven colors on my table

Dear Seven,
you don't exist yet

Yet means
before the end
of summer

A dress are red

45

Three points of view
three pronouns

You are the world

No one passes
from a one to another one

The objects file by
you and *I* don't touch

Someone is motionless

Looks

46

Neither the words
nor the sentences
the objects don't touch

A flower doesn't mean
orange

A lemon is not yellow

Is not signifies
what?
Dear Pornographer, what?
is false in the manner of the faces

Equal is impossible

47

Yesterday is opposite

Dear Maya, your cloud
above some-
one is going back to sleep

A suitcase is green
contained its key

The glass self-gleams

Power & Heat
in sleep's technique

48

Dear E., you say no
I don't know

Are you going to go?
you're not staying

At what distance
a wave is blue?

A question doesn't answer
answers

49

The day's name is: indigo

What are you afraid of?
means we
two or I

How long is this book?

Dear Jule, Dear Juliette
a name contains another name

Hear donkey, hear goat

50

Fifty or three
or ten
means not one

Not one remains

A violet bedspread
means to think one more night

To think means something
is extra

MARJORIE PERLOFF

WRITING ON THE BORDER: From Lyric to Language Game in the Fiction of Ingeborg Bachmann

> —Think in stitches. Think in sentences. Think in settlements. Think in willows. Think in respect. Think in farther. Think with while they will. In this case the succession of sentences do not pass muster. What is a sentence. A sentence is felt in a storm.
>
> —Gertrude Stein, "Sentences"[1]

In an important book called *Poet's Prose, The Crisis in American Verse* (1953), Stephen Fredman posits that "the most talented poets of my own postwar generation. . .have turned to prose as a form somehow most consonant with a creative figuration of our time."[2] Fredman's poets-who-have-turned-to-prose include William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, John Ashbery, and such recent experimentalists as David Antin, David Bromige, Ron Silliman, and Michael Davidson. "The American poet," says Fredman, "uses prose. . .to create, through attentive receptivity, a space of permission in which the world is allowed to appear as it is" (SF 6). And further: in its recent versions, poet's prose tries to erase the "boundary between literature and factual or theoretical discourse—philosophy, criticism, linguistics, and so forth" (SF 134).

I have been thinking a good bit, lately, about this characterization of a philosophical or theoretical "poet's prose" as "somehow most consonant with a creative figuration of our own time." To what does the *somehow* actually refer? And might not "poet's prose" be less a national-cultural (U.S.) phenomenon than an historical (post World War II) one, given, for starters, such poet's prose as Octavio Paz's *Aguila O Sol?* (Spanish-American, 1950), Emmanuel Hocquard's *Un privé à Tanger* (French, 1987), or Steve McCaffery's *The Black Debt* (British-Canadian, 1989)? Then, too, what about gender? In the U.S., poet's prose seems to hold the same appeal for female poets (e.g., Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Kathleen Fraser, Leslie Scalapino, Joan Retallack) as for the male ones cited above, for gay poets (e.g., Bob Gluck, Beverly Dahlen) as for straights.[3] But in other nations, the lyric impulse may

well be constructed differently—a problem I want to explore in a moment in the case of the Austrian poet turned dramatist and fiction writer, Ingeborg Bachmann.

The key theoretical text on the historicity of the verse/prose relationship is a book unfortunately still unavailable in English although translation plans are now underway: namely, Henri Meschonnic's mammoth (700-page) *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* of 1982.[4] The binary opposition "poetry" / "prose," Meschonnic demonstrates with a stunning array of examples, is by no means a universal, much less an essential one. It revolves around three issues: verse, image, and fiction. The first (poetry = verse and therefore prose = the *sans vers*, the *sans rythme)* was by no means an axiom of Classical theory: witness Aristotle's insistence *(Poetics 1447b)* that "people. . .speak of elegiac poets, or epic (that is, hexameter) poets, as if it were not the imitation *(mimesis)* that makes the poet, but the verse that entitles them all indiscriminately to the name" (HM 398). Indeed, it was not until the Romantic period that the binary opposition of prose (the ordinary, the utilitarian, the everyday) and the "higher" discourse of poetry (metered language, rich in images, expressive of the harmony of the universe) gained wide acceptance. Rousseau and Hegel, the Schlegels and Schelley--these, Meschonnic points out, paved the way for the codification, on the part of the Russian Formalists, of the dichotomy between *forme* and *fond*, poetry and non-poetry or mere "background." A Formalist-Structuralist like Tzvetan Todorov opposes the schema of verse to the transparency of prose, in which, he claims, no such schema exist; Structuralist typologies of prose, accordingly, deal not with language but with the kinds of narrative and the forms of narrativity (HM 426-27). Even Bakhtin's distinction between poetry as monologic, prose as potentially dialogic, confuses, Meschonnic points out, language and ideology, the semiotic and the semantic, the linguistic and the social (HM 447-48). Extending an argument already made by Northrop Frye,[5] Meschonnic notes that there is no "I" in poetry without an implied "you," and, more important, that the rhythm of prose is just as distant from the rhythm of "ordinary" speech as is the rhythm of poetry. Indeed, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically, "L'écrit set autre quo du transcrit" ("the written is other than the transcribed," HM 405). And if "prose" is no more synonymous with "natural" language than "verse" is, the binary opposition between poetry and prose breaks down.

Here is where twentieth-century developments come in. Modernism, Meschonnic suggests, referring especially to Apollinaire and Cendrars, Pierre Reverdy and Jacques Roubaud, "has not only destabilized the opposition between verse and prose; it has also undone the *poème objet* (the poem as object]" (HM 458). But that destabilization does not mean, as the common wisdom would have it, that the poet now has greater

"freedom" than in the past. Rather, Meschonnic posits somewhat gnomically "The freedom of the poet is really no more than his *[sic]* historicity. Not a freedom of choice. But the imposition of alterity" (HM 615). Which is to say that the dialectic now shifts from the verse/prose opposition to that between the "free verse" of the earlier century and what Meschonnic terms the *l'inconnu* ("unknown") now to come, an unknown whose trajectory has everything to do with the actual circumstances of history, politics, and culture.

The writing of Ingeborg Bachmann is a fascinating case in point. Born in 1926 in Klagenfurt in Southern Austria, not far from the Italian and Yugoslav borders, a twelve-year old at the time of the *Anschluss*,[6] and hence a teen-ager during the war (her father was evidently a Nazi collaborator), Bachmann came to Vienna in 1946 to study philosophy. She wrote a doctoral dissertation called *The Critical Reception of Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy*, a dissertation, she later explained, written not in veneration but *against* Heidegger: "In Vienna, we were always waging a fierce fight against German metaphysics" (I 136). In 1953 she published her first volume of poems, *Die gestundetete Zeit (Mortgaged Time)*, which won the coveted literary prize of the Group 47 and, with it, instant fame. Interviewed regularly on radio, TV, and in the newspapers, she was the subject of a cover story in *Der Spiegel* in 1954. Two years later, she published her second collection of poems, *Anrufung des Grossen Bären (Invocation to the Great Bear)*, which won even more critical praise, and in 1959 Bachmann became the first holder of the newly created chair in Poetics at the University of Frankfurt.

And then Bachmann stopped writing poetry. Her second collection was her last. Between '59 and '64 she wrote only a handful of poems, mostly about the difficulties of writing poems, and her last poem, "Keine Delikatessen" ("No Delicacies") was framed as a farewell to poetry. By this time, she had already turned to the writing of radio plays (e.g., "The Good God of Manhattan") and short stories, and in the last decade of her short life she wrote only prose fiction. *Malina* (1971), which is my focus here, is the first volume of a projected trilogy called *Todesarten (Ways of Death)*. This trilogy was never completed because Bachmann died in a terrible fire caused by a smoking accident in bed (it may have been a suicide) in her Rome apartment in September 1973. She was forty-six years old.

Why did Bachmann, whose early lyric was favorably compared to that of Paul Celan, Rilke, and Eliot, stop writing "poetry" or rather verse? Even during her years of poetic success, she expressed doubts about the lyric. "I think," Bachmann tells one interviewer in 1956, "that we can't, that we shouldn't, use the old images, the way, say, Mörike or Goethe used them, because they would sound insincere coming from our mouths. We must find true sentences, which are worthy of our own consciousness and of the

changed world" (I 19). And in 1961, she explains that the poem "Ihr Worte" ("You Words") was written after a five-year hiatus, during which she promised herself to stop writing poetry. "I have nothing," she says, "against poems, but you have to understand that suddenly, one can have everything against them, against every metaphor, every sound, every rule for putting words together, against this wholly inspired power to make words and images appear. That one would like to choke this power so that one might judge what it really is, what it should be" (I 25).

Here Bachmann seems to be echoing Paul Celan's sentiments regarding the language of the "great" classical German poets:

> The German lyric. . .cannot, despite all its invocation of the tradition to which it belongs, speak the language which many a sympathetic ear continues to expect from it. Its language has become soberer, plainer; it mistrusts the 'beautiful,' it tries to be true. It is, then. . .so to speak, a 'grayer' language, a language which, among other things, wants to see its 'musicality' settled in a different place, a place where it no longer has anything in common with that 'harmony' which sounded more or less unchallenged, side by side with the *most dreadful.*[7]

The reference is, of course, to the War and the Holocaust, events that inevitably made the lyric language of Goethe and Heine, Hölderlin and even Rilke, problematic for a German-speaking Jewish poet. Or perhaps for the non-Jewish poet as well, Bachmann, for example, being unable to escape a sense of collective guilt for what the Nazis—and that category evidently included her own father—had done to the Jews and other minorities before and during the war. No doubt, then, she shared Celan's uneasiness as to what she later regarded as the "Establishment" language of her early poetry.

What was that poetry like? Here is a four-line poem called "Im Gewitter der Rosen" ("In the Storm of Roses"):

> Wohin wir uns wenden in Gewitter der Rosen,
> ist die Nacht von Dornen erhellt, und der Donner
> des Laubs, das so leise war, in den Büschen,
> folgt uns jetz auf dem Fuss.
>
> Wherever we turn in the storm of roses
> the night is lit up by thorns, and the thunder
> of the foliage, that was so quiet in the bushes
> now follows us, hard on our heels.[8]

The "storm of roses" and "thunder" of leaves that seem to pursue the speaker wherever she turns, are familiar enough Romantic images: one thinks, for example, of the "huge cliff," ominously striding after the guilty boy who has stolen the boat at Ullswater in Wordsworth's *Prelude*.[9] But in Bachmann's surrealist landscape, the night is illuminated, not by lightning flashes signalling the impending storm, but by "thorns." Indeed, the "storm of roses" generally associated with sexual love here points to the Passion (the crown of thorns); Bachmann's is a world of suffering, whose cause is never explained and which occurs outside a specified context. It merely is.

Like Celan's gnomic lyrics, Bachmann's has an outward formality that belies its indeterminacy: three four-stress lines followed by a foreshortened three-stress one, this last line made up of six ominous monosyllables. "Wohin wir uns wenden im Gewitter der Rosen"—four w's and four short i's as well as the internal rhyme on feminine endings ("wenden" / "Rosen")—this pattern of alliteration and assonance is kept up throughout. In line 2, the consonance of "Dornen" / "Donner," in line 3, the alliteration of I's, and in line 4, the foregrounding of the emphatic f phoneme ("folgt," "Fuss")—all these are markers of poeticity; they testify to the faith in a poetic that distinguishes itself from ordinary language.

Phonemic density coupled with semantic openness: the American poets who most resemble Bachmann in this regard are the "deep image" poets of the fifties and sixties—James Wright, Galway Kinnell, and such heirs as Louise Gluck and Charles Wright—the connection perhaps being the visionary poetry of Georg Trakl, which had such a telling influence on these poets. The mode in "The Storm of Roses" and elsewhere in *Mortgaged Time*, is almost always first-person, present-tense, the imagery drawn from nature, the tone, one of wonder at the mysteries of the universe, the meaning appropriately elusive. Bachmann's lyric is by no means as dense and enigmatic as Celan's, but she has, at this stage, a similar faith in the power of images, images presented without authorial intrusion, as the locus of meanings. Take a second short poem, this time from *Invocation of the Great Bear:*

Schatten Rosen Schatten

Unter einen fremden Himmel
Schatten Rosen
Schatten
auf einer fremden Erde
zwischen Rosen und Schatten
in einem fremden Wasser
main Schatten

Shadow Roses Shadow

Beneath a foreign sky
shadow roses
shadow
on a foreign earth
between roses and shadows
in a foreign water
my shadow (MA 128-29)

The key word here is "fremden" ("foreign"), which appears three times in the space of the poem's twenty-one words.[10] First "shadow" applies to the roses themselves—"shadow roses" may be a particular species of rose; or again the reference may be to the roses' appearance in a particular light. But then the roses themselves cast a shadow "on a foreign earth," and, in the final epiphany, it is "between roses and shadows / and in a foreign water," that the poet sees her own shadow. No matter how foreign the setting (Bachmann wrote this poem shortly after having taken up residence in Rome), there seems to be no escape from the shadow self. One is reminded of Celan's:

Stehen im Schatten
des Wundenmals in der Luft.

Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
für dich
allein.

Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
auch ohne
Sprache.

To stand, in the shadow
of the scar up in the air.

To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all there is room for in that,
even without
language.[11]

But whereas Celan's interrogation of poetic convention led to the writing of an ever sparer, more rigidly compressed, more gnomic lyric, Bachmann's led to the writing of "prose." Why? My hunch is that her choice has a great deal to do with gender. Bachmann wanted to free herself, not only of the "high" style and imagery of German Romantic lyric but of its conventional male voice as well, a voice she oddly adopted in her own poetry. In "Dark Words," for example, she appears as Orpheus searching for Eurydice; in the title poem of *Mortgaged Time*, the "I" is a chaser of hounds, his beloved "sinks in the sand, / It climbs around her waving hair, / it breaks into her words" (MA 43);[12] and in "Bohemia Lies by the Sea," a re-working of the question Antigonus puts to the mariner in *The Winter's Tale*, III,iii ("Thou art perfect then our ship hath touched upon / The deserts of Bohemia?"), the speaker describes himself as "a man from Bohemia, a vagrant, a player / who holds nothing and whom nothing holds, / granted only, by a questionable sea, to gaze at the land of my choice (MA 179). Even the late poem "Exil" ("Exile"), which deals with the poet's ambivalence about her "German" identity, especially "the German language / this cloud about me / that I keep as a house" ("der Deutschen Sprache / dieser Wolke um mich / die ich halte als Haus"), oddly presents the exiled "I" as male:

Ein Toter bin ich der wandelt
gemeldet nirgends mehr
unbekannt im Reich des Präfekten
überzählig in den goldenen Städten
und im grünenden Land (IBW)

A dead man am I who wanders
no longer registered anywhere
unknown in the empire of the prefect
superfluous in the golden cities
and in the greening countryside.

Why should Bachmann present herself as a male subject? In a 1971 interview, she explains that *Malina* is a book she had always known she would write some day, that she was always searching for its central character but didn't know how to handle that character because:

I had only known how to tell a story from a masculine position. But I have often asked myself: why, really? I have not

> understood it, not even in the case of the short stories, why I so often had to adopt the voice of the masculine "I." So for me it was like finding my very own self, namely not to deny this feminine "I" and yet to put the weight on the masculine "I" as well. . . . (I 99-100)

What Bachmann means here, I think, is that the fluidity of autobiographical prose fiction, a form less conventionalized than lyric, gave her the opportunity to deconstruct the subject position endemic to Romantic lyric, even as, I shall suggest below, the focus of her "fiction" continues to be on language events rather than on narrative structure. It is important to remember that nineteenth-century German lyric has no female poet of the stature of Emily Dickinson, no twentieth-century woman poet as experimental as Gertrude Stein, who might have served as Bachmann's model. On the other hand, modern Austrian literature did make available to her a subversive body of writing that, while not, strictly speaking, "poetry," could point the way to the opening of the field the poet was looking for. The fiction of Robert Musil and Elias Canetti, for example, provided her with an example of a "minority" German, the Austrian of the period being curiously polyglot in its absorption of the racial, linguistic, and cultural differences that resulted from the repeated shifting of national borders. And, even more important than the example of Musil or Canetti, was the "minority German" produced in his Cambridge exile by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

II

Bachmann had begun to read Wittgenstein in the early fifties when the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* were almost unknown in Vienna, and she helped convince the Suhrkamp Verlag to republish these works in accessible paperback editions.[13] In 1953, the same year her first collection of poems appeared, she published one of the first critical essays to be written on Wittgenstein in German.[14] Here, as in those interviews where she is questioned about her particular interest in Wittgenstein, Bachmann refers the reader to the *Tractatus*'s "question of language," specifically, the key proposition (5.6): "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." (I 82-83) "What I really learned [from Wittgenstein]," she tells an interviewer in 1973, ". . . is how to think with enormous exactitude and clear expression" (I 136). And she cites the "beautiful" conclusion to the *Tractatus:* "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen" ("Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"). If "the limits of my language are the limits of my world," the writer's task is to *unwrite (zerschreiben)* the phrase-making of the dominant discourse, the prefabricated sentences by means of which business-as-usual is conducted (I 84). And she cautions that the writer must stay away

from the Big Words of public discourse—words like Democracy, Economy, Capitalism, or Socialism—for the aim of *writing* is not to *tell* but to *represent* (I 91).

Here the reference is to *Philosophical Investigations #116:* "When philosophers use a word—"knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition," "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." It is that "everyday use" that provides Bachmann with a new poetics, the "language-game" poetics of *Malina.*

Superficially, *Malina* is a triangle love story which ends with a murder—the narrator's own. The three principals are characterized on the opening page, which gives us "The Cast":

> Ivan: Born 1935 in Pécs (formerly Fünfkirchen), Hungary. Has lived for a number of years in Vienna and pursues a well organized line of work, in a building on the Kärntnerring. So as not to compromise Ivan and his future with unnecessary complications, this building shall be designated as an Institute for Extremely Urgent Affairs, since its business is money. It is not the Credit Union.
>
> Béla
> András: The children, aged 7 and 5
>
> Malina: Age impossible to determine from his appearance, has turned forty today, author of an "Apocrypha" that is no longer available in the bookshops, and of which only a few copies were sold in the late fifties. For the sake of anonymity, Civil Servant Class A, employed by the Austrian Army Museum, where advanced degrees in history (his major subject) and art history (his minor) made it possible for him to find employment and move into a good position, where he is regularly advancing without making a move, without ever calling attention to himself by interfering, displaying ambition, making demands or petty suggestions for the improvement of the procedures and written transactions between the Ministry of Defense on the Franz-Josefs Quai and the Museum of the Arsenal which, without being especially conspicuous, belongs to the greatest curiosities of our city.

I: Austrian passport, issued by the Ministry of the Interior. Official Austrian I.D. Eyes—br., Hair—bl., born in Klagenfurt; some dates follow and a profession, crossed out twice and written over, addresses, crossed out three times, and above them written clearly: residence, Ungargasse 6, Vienna III.

Time: Today

Place: Vienna[15]

But neither "triangle love story" nor "murder story" (Bachmann does use many of the devices of detective fiction) accurately describe this novel's strange plot. To begin with, the narrator and Malina, who live together, are never presented as lovers: rather, their relationship seems to be that of brother and sister, but a brother and sister whose fates are curiously intertwined, Malina being more accurately the narrator's male alter ego or animus. Malina is never jealous of Ivan; he pays no attention to his comings and goings and is oddly self-sufficient throughout the story. When, in the third chapter ("Last Things"), he comes to the "I"s aid, it is only to make her see what has been inside her all along. And for that matter there is yet another man, not listed in the cast of characters, who furnishes the title for the second chapter, namely "The Third Man," who is the narrator's father—both her real father and her nightmare version of the Father as Patriarch, Nazi officer, Victimizer, Torturer.

Such synopsis makes the novel sound histrionic, but Bachmann avoids melodrama by grounding her narrative firmly in the social and political realities of postwar Vienna. No one ever talks of war in this novel but that only makes its presence more real. As Bachmann put it in the poem "Every Day" ("Alle Tage"): "War is no longer declared, / only continued. The monstrous has become everyday," MA 53). The "now" of *Malina* is the so-called "seven German years," as Viennese society referred to the period 1938-45, when Austria belonged to the German Reich. The term "seven German years" is of course an egregious evasion of the truth, which is that Austria was not so much "occupied" by Hitler as readily absorbed by him and even welcomed by a large part of the population with open arms. At war's end, the country was accorded the status of "occupied nation," along with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, but when the Iron Curtain was drawn across Central Europe, Austria, briefly occupied by the four Allied powers (the U.S., Britain, France, the Soviet Union), was given to the West. As a formerly occupied nation, it never underwent the deNazification that marked the postwar years in West Germany. On the contrary, Austrian society tried to resume its prewar way of life: to restore

its opera house and symphony, its museums and architectural monuments, as if nothing had really happened, as if the "seven German years" had been some sort of mistake. It is this mind set—a mind set we now know only too well from the Waldheim affair—that Bachmann satirizes in her account of the summer vacation life on the Wolfgangsee, as it is experienced by families like the Altenwyls and Wantchuras.

In this context, it is significant that Ivan is Hungarian, whereas Malina, who comes from the Yugoslavian border, has a Slavic name. The novel, as Mark Anderson points out in his Afterword to the Boehm translation, "is a fictional microcosm of the House of Austria with its Germanic, Hungarian and Slavic components" (M 230). Ivan speaks Hungarian to his two young children, who live with their mother in Budapest and come to visit on weekends; the narrator and Malina sometimes speak to each other in Slovenian dialect (e.g. "Jaz in ti. In ti in jaz ["Me and you. You and me."]). Only the narrator herself is of "pure" German descent; only she, it seems, is consumed by war guilt and has dreams about Nazi troops and concentration camps, in which her father seems to figure largely.

The three principals live in a street called the Ungargasse, Ivan at #9, the narrator and Malina at #6 (hence mirror images). The Ungargasse lies just outside the Ring or Inner City in a quarter neither elegant nor shabby—a quarter fairly nondescript that is nevertheless adored by the narrator as her "Ungargassenland." The appeal of the street seems to be its anonymity, an anonymity in which the Germanic features of the Vienna inside the Ring give way to the possibilities of a more neutral, less culpable Hungary, as represented by Ivan. Indeed, the narrator's obsessive passion for Ivan—a passion that grows and grows and that cannot be satiated by their rendezvous or telephone conversations—reflects the narrator's consuming desire to be not-German-speaking, not a woman, not an intellectual, not a writer—not, in short, Ingeborg Bachmann herself. If the scholarly, detached, highly professional (significantly he and the narrator first meet when he is lecturing on the Benjaminian title "Art in the Age of Technology"), seemingly sexless but occasionally violent Malina is her intellectual alter ego, Ivan represents the opposite pole—utter normalcy, uncomplicatedness, a happy-go-lucky response to everyday life, a predilection for trivial pursuits and entertainments, the "ability to make me laugh again" (M 18).

Ironically, however, Ivan and Malina are more alike than either of them is like the woman narrator. For both, life is something that can be dealt with quite readily: one takes it one day at a time without too much concern. Both go to their offices and work regular hours, without asking too many questions. The woman, on the other hand, even though she is neither wife nor mother but a writer, spends her days at home alone, waiting for Ivan to phone or Malina to come home. Sometimes her secretary, Fraülein

Jellinek, is present; sometimes the maid Lina. For the "I," nothing is ever simple or uncomplicated. The slightest household task—boiling water, clearing the table, opening the window—becomes problematic; the present is always haunted by a terrifying but unknown past. "When I say 'today,'" she says early in the novel, "my breathing becomes irregular, an arrhythmia sets in, which can already be detected on an electrocardiogram" (MA 9).

Malina makes no overt ideological statements; it provides no commentary about the "plight of the woman writer"; it contains no manifesto for a better future. But having given up the male speaking voice that characterized her formal lyric, Bachmann is able to articulate, for the first time in her career, a feminist poetic. One of her stylistic signatures in *Malina* is the dialogue that isn't really a dialogue but a "conversation" recorded as a set of truncated (and hence indeterminate) sentences, whereby the fiction's meanings are created. The first chapter, "Happy with Ivan," begins as follows:

> Smoked again and drank again, counted the cigarettes, the glasses, saved another two cigarettes for today, because between today and Monday, there are three days without Ivan. Sixty cigarettes later, however, Ivan is back in Vienna, first he'll call the time message to check his watch, then the wakeup service 00, which returns his call right away, immediately afterwards he'll fall asleep as instantly as only Ivan can, awaken to his wake-up call, in a grumpy mood, which he expresses differently each time, with sighs, curses, tantrums, complaints. Next he's forgotten all about being grumpy and has raced into the bathroom to brush his teeth, shower, and shave. He'll turn on the transistor and listen to the morning news. Austria I.APA. Here are the headlines: Washington. . . (MA 25; ellipses Bachmann's)

Here is the beginning of obsession. The narrator has recently begun an affair with a total stranger, whom she happened to bump into in front of a neighborhood flower shop, and who is Ivan. The projection into his routine (we never know, of course, what Ivan is really thinking or doing or even what his last name is), takes on a surreal air: the cigarettes, the glasses, the wake-up calls—all these pave the way for the set of telephone sentences, which becomes Bachmann's new lyric mode. As the "I" explains:

> Nonetheless we have managed to conquer our first few sets of sentences, wayward sentence beginnings, half-sentences,

sentence endings, surrounded by the halo of mutual consideration, and up to now, most of the sentences may be found in the category telephone sentences. We practice them over and over, since Ivan calls once from his office on the Kärntnerring, or a second time late in the afternoon, or in the evening from home.

Hello. Hello?
It's me, who else?
Oh right, of course, excuse
How I? And you?
I don't know. This evening?
I can barely understand you
Barely? What? So you can
I can barely hear you, can you
What? Is anything?
No, nothing, later on you can
Of course, I'd better call later
I, I was supposed to go with friends
Of course, if you can't then
I didn't say that, only if you don't
In any case, let's talk later
OK, but around six, because
But that's too late for me
Yes, actually for me too, but
Today maybe it makes no sense
Has someone come in?
No, only now Fraülein Jellinek is
Oh, I see, you're no longer alone
But please later, please, for sure (MA 36)

This could hardly be more ordinary, or could it? The lovers say just exactly what any X would say when he/she calls Y to make a date: "What are you doing tonight?" "Can you make it by six?" "Call me later," and so on. But there are two marked oddities. First, Bachmann's sentences have no proper beginnings or endings. It's often not clear to what a sentence is responding and its ending is truncated, so that we have to guess what's really going on. Thus the fourth line above is evidently a response to the question "How are you?" and the fifth, "I don't know" responds, not to the "And you?" above it, but to a missing suggestion such as "Do you want to get together tonight?" Again, line 9, "What? Is something?" has to be completed by a word like "wrong" or a phrase like "going on."

Thus, although the language could hardly be flatter and although we all talk to our intimates this way, leaving sentences hanging and assuming the person at the other end of the line knows what we're saying, communication in *Malina* is always already occluded. Misunderstanding is the order of the day, as in "Of course if you can't then," with its response, "I didn't say that, only if you don't." Partly it's the nature of the telephone situation—a situation in which the verbal response may or may not match facial expression and gesture. And further: telephone sentences, like the smoking sentences or chess sentences or scolding sentences used later in the novel, are deceptive in their formulaic quality. The novel's "I" never says what she really thinks.

But, then, which sentences belong to "I"? The second peculiarity of Bachmann's language games is that the reader usually can't tell who is speaking, the "I" or Ivan. Which I is which? In this particular example, the only clues come at the beginning and the end. Ivan is the one who calls, so presumably he says, "It's me, who'd you think?" Toward the end (line 21), Fraülein Jellinek's presence is mentioned, so presumably the speaker of that line is the woman who employs Jellinek as secretary. But who is it who says, "I really should see these"? In the prose that follows the dialogue, the narrator tells us that "Ivan and I both have friends and also acquaintances, but only very seldom someone of whom the other one has heard or knows what their names are. With these friends and other people, we have to take turns going out to dinner, or at least meet them at a café, or we have to take foreigners sight-seeing, without knowing what to do with them, and most of the time we must also wait for a phone call (MA 36).

One might conclude that such doubling (the sentence sets don't really constitute a dialogue because there are not two distinct characters) is designed to suggest that the lovers are perfectly in sync, that they speak the same language and know each others needs implicitly. But that isn't quite the way these language games work. Consider the following set of smoking sentences:

> Now I just have to get the ashtray
> Just a minute, OK, me too
> Have you lit one too?
> There. Now. No, it's not working
> Don't you have any matches?
> The last one I, no, now on the candle
> Do you hear that too? Hey, get off the line
> This phone has its little tics
> What? someone is constantly cutting in. What sticks?
> I said "tics," it's not important, "tics" with a hard "t"
> I don't understand that stuff about sticks?

Sorry. It was the wrong word for it
Why wrong, what do you mean?
Nothing, just that when you repeat a word so often[16]

The breakdown of communication between the lovers takes place at a number of levels. There is first the obvious noise in the channel, the noise from a crossed wire that interrupts their dialogue with someone else's conversation. But even without this intrusion, the conversation is extremely odd. The smoking ritual becomes a substitute sexual ritual, the lighting of the cigarette designed, so to speak, to turn the other one on. Hence the double entendre of being "out of matches" and needing to use a candle. But because the particular language game being played restricts the area of discussion to that which is actually happening or about to happen, there is soon nothing further to say. The "word" that one repeats "so often" is not the word the "I" wants to speak or to hear. And then too: why is this conversation occurring at all when Ivan could simply drop everything (as could the narrator) and cross the street so as to join the other? What, in this context, is the meaning of the cigarette ritual? Is it an erotic rite or a talking game that functions as an escape from eroticism? For that matter, are the two lovers playing the same language game? And does each understand the other's game?

At the end of the dialogue above, the narrator thinks: "But even if four people are talking at once, I can still make out Ivan's voice, and as long as I hear him and know that he hears me, I'm alive. So long as the telephone, even if we have to interrupt the conversation, rings again, screams, buzzes, raves, sometimes with a tone too loud or several tones too soft, if you add the refrigerator, the record player or turn on the water in the tub" (M A 40). But what are *his* thoughts about the phone call? Does he have thoughts about it at all? Or is a phone call just a phone call, in which case the narrator is merely deluding herself?

"We have a lot of head-sentences," says the "I" a little later, referring to sentences like "Who put this nonsense in your head." "Piles of them, just like the telephone sentences, the chess sentences or the sentences about life in general, but we're still missing a lot of sentence sets. About feelings, we don't have a single sentence, because Ivan won't pronounce one, because I don't dare to make up the first sentence of this set" (MA 46). This is a markedly Wittgensteinian motif: if "the limits of my language are the limits of the world," the non-existence of sentences about feelings means that "feelings" don't exist, at least not insofar as they are acted upon. Again, if "The sense of the world must lie outside the world" (*Tractatus* 6.41), the world of sentences-in-the-world cannot be transcended in the world. But the most relevant propositions in the *Tractatus* are the following:

For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too
[cannot be expressed.
The riddle does not exist.
If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.
(6.5)

Which means, in practice that the narrator never asks Ivan about anything that really matters ("It must lie outside the world"), for she knows that she cannot receive an answer. Consequently, the lovers only ask questions that *can* be answered (e.g., "This evening?") or give answers to possible questions, like "maybe later I can."

How do these language games relate to Bachmann's earlier lyrics? The elaborate images, metaphors and allusions of the poems are replaced by the smallest of deictics: **yes, no, now, well, and, but, then, oh,** and especially **"I"** and **"you,"** where "I" and "you" are curiously blurred. As in the work of Gertrude Stein, however, the "simplicity" of language, the rigidly restricted register of this phrasal poetry doesn't preclude the text from containing a dense network of meanings within its particular rhythmic structure. In one of the narrator's happiest moments with Ivan, when they are driving back into Vienna from an outing in the country and he has turned the car radio way up, we read:

Auprès de ma blonde
I'm
What are you?
I'm
What?
I'm happy
Qu'il fait bon
What are you saying?
I didn't say anything
Fait bon, fait bon
I'll say it to you later
What do you want later?
I'll never say it
Qu'il fait bon
Go ahead and say it
It's too loud, I can't say it any louder
What do you want to say?
I can't say it any louder
Qu'il fait bon dormir
Say it, you have to say it today
Qu'il fait bon fait bon

That I've been resurrected
Because I've survived the winter
Because I am so happy
Because I already see the Stadtpark
Fait bon, fait bon
Because Ivan exists
Because Ivan and I
Qu'il fait bon dormir! (MA 58-59)

Here the French song refrain ("Auprès de ma blonde / qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon") frames a series of sentences about *saying*, sentences that pose the question: what does it mean to say anything or not to say it? And again, when does one "say" it and to whom? The question remains open even though "say" and its cognates appears nine times in the twenty-nine line passage; the impossibility of "saying" yields to the anaphoric series of the last eight lines, which finally reveal little. If the narrator is happy because Ivan has entered her life, Ivan is happy because he already sees the Stadtpark (i.e., we're almost home). If she says or thinks "Because Ivan and I," the loud refrain drowns her out with the final "Qu'il fait bon dormir!," suggesting that Ivan hasn't been listening to her anyway. And in the night scene that follows this line, Ivan asks her: "why is there only a Wailing Wall, why hasn't anyone ever built a Wall of Joy?"

Bachmann's new form of lyric —a lyric of language games—is thus, like Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" or her Picasso portrait, a structure of repetitions and permutations. "Sagen" ("to say") takes on a slightly different meaning every time it is used, as does the word "glücklich" ("happy")[17] and the "qu'il fait bon" refrain. And the set of sentences and sentence fragments never constitute a coherent paragraph. The incompleteness of statement, surrounded as the statements are by white space, conveys the ever increasing inability of the lovers to *say*.

In Chapter 3 ("Last Things"), the narrator, sensing she has lost Ivan and the happiness his normalcy represents for her, turns more and more to her alter ego Malina. The dialogues between "Me" and "Malina" are just that—dialogues, with the occasional stage directions like "I" (leggermente): or "I (con fuoco)", operatic conventions being used to heighten the melodrama. For example:

Malina: Stop falling down all the time. Get up. Go out, have fun, neglect me, do something, anything!
I: (dolcissimo) I do something? Abandon you? Leave you? (MA 321)

Between these arias for two clearly distinct voices, arias in which Malina gradually gets the "I" to confess to her deepest feelings and fears, even as the intervening prose paragraphs present us with her more private meditations, Bachmann introduces one final telephone conversation between "I" and "Ivan." It follows the "I"'s sad reflection that she and Ivan don't have time to play chess any more: "we play less and less. . .the chess sentences are lying barren, other sentence sets are also suffering some loss" (MA 266-67):

> Unfortunately I have, my time is
> Of course if you're under so much time pressure
> It's just that today I have especially little time
> Naturally, if you have no time now
> Later, when I have more time again
> In time, we will be, It's just that now
> Then we'll be able to, once when you have time
> Just at this time, when things straighten out
> Your time must be a little less
> If only I could at the right time
> But where has the time gone, not too late
> I still have so little time, that unfortunately
> Later, when you have more time again, perhaps
> Later, I will have more time again!

This sentence set has fourteen lines and may be read as a postmodern sonnet on time, a parodic version, perhaps, of a Shakespeare sonnet (e.g., "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced / The rich proud cost of outward buried age"). The word "time" appears once (but only once) in every line; in the German, the repetition of the emphatic noun "Zeit" is even more noticeable, both aurally and visually, the capital Z dominating the poem's layout, culminating in its columnar appearance in:

> Wenn du dann wieder mehr Zeit has, vielleicht
> Später werde ich dann mehr Zeit haben! (MA 266-67)

Perhaps the main difference between this phrasal poetry of repetition and Bachmann's earlier lyric is that the "poem" is no longer self-sufficient. It lacks a frame. Indeed, after the fourteenth line above, we read, in the prose passage that follows, "Every day, sometimes even cheerfully, Malina and I brood about the horrible things that might still happen tonight in Vienna." Between the crimes and murders reported in the paper, and the "murder" the heroine of *Malina* is about to undergo because of Ivan's desertion, there are, of course, endless metonymic connections. The

embedded "poem" thus becomes part of a larger context—a context, in the case of *Malina*, made up of prose narrative, found text, mock interview, the fairy tale of the *Princess of Kagran*, the Malina dialogues, and so on. The second chapter, "The Third Man" is a series of surrealistic dream sequences, in which memories of childhood sexual abuse on the part of the father (sexual abuse that is part of the larger political oppression), unfold like so many film shots. Ironically, the prose of the dream sequences is much more conventionally "poetic" than the lineated language games we have been looking at. Bachmann thus reverses the Romantic opposition I spoke of earlier, the opposition: prose equals the ordinary, everyday; verse equals the harmony and order of the universe. On the contrary, the novel's telephone sentences and their cognates refuse to acknowledge the authoritative male voice of an Orpheus or of an Odysseus, recounting his adventures in densely allusive and metaphoric lyrics. Rather, they dramatize the process whereby the phraseology of everyday life becomes the terrain of warfare—the warfare that, as Bachmann repeatedly points out, is just as common in peacetime.

On the novel's last page, in which the narrator's "death" and removal from the scene via the crack in the wall is recounted, the phone rings once more (MA 355-56):

> Excuse me?
> No?
> Then I didn't express myself clearly.
> It must be a mistake.
> The number is 723144.
> Yes, Ungargasse 6.
> No, there isn't.
> There's no woman here.
> I'm telling you, there was never anyone here by that name.
> There's no one else here.
> My number is 723144.
> My name?
> Malina.

Death is the absence of all conversation, the end of the language game. For in this series of thirteen sentence units, there is only one speaker, and he is identified in the unlucky number 13 as Malina. If, that is to say, the narrator has "died" ("There's no woman here"), then Ivan no longer exists either. His words are no longer represented, and all the evasions on the phone ("there was never anyone here by that name) are Malina's. The address and phone number are now solely his. More important: each sentence now ends with a period, in contrast to the complex stychomythia

of the earlier lyric segments, in which the phrases and clauses were always left open. The sentence series culminates in a short paragraph describing Malina's receding footsteps and than the terrible flatness of the final complete sentence, "It was murder." The conclusion is pure prose.

III

How, then, are we to understand the prose/poetry opposition in *Malina?* To say that Bachmann "gave up" poetry in favor of "the novel" is surely inadequate. She gave up, not "poetry" but "poems" in the sense of fixed, circumscribed, framed, independent lyric units. Within the novel itself, "poems," in this sense, are associated with Ivan. "He has come," the narrator says at the beginning of "Happy with Ivan," "to make consonants constant and comprehensible (fest und fasslich) again, to open up the vowels so that they can sound fully, to let the words come through my lips again, to restore those first connections that had been disrupted" (MA 29). Ivan is, in other words, the maker of metres, of rhythmic regularity, even as Malina regularly speaks the "plain truth" of prose. What the "I" learns in the course of the novel is that the constancy and comprehensibility of consonants and the "full sound" of vowels are suspect, that the "connections," once disrupted, can't be re-established so readily, that the "problems" can't simply be "solved."

Here the middle term posed by Chapter Two is especially interesting. This chapter, "The Third Man," is in many ways the novel's most conventional—a series of Gothic, hallucinatory dream or memory images in which the "I" is abused, punished, and tortured by the Father:

> My father has brought me to a tall building, there's even a garden above, he lets me plant flowers and little trees in it to pass the time, he makes jokes about the many Christmas trees I'm cultivating, they are from the Christmases of my childhood, but so long as he's making jokes it's all right, there are silver balls and it's blooming violet and yellow, only they aren't the right flowers. I also plant and sow in many ceramic pots; always the flowers that come up have the opposite, unwanted colors, I'm dissatisfied and my father says: "Who do you think you are, a princess?" Who do you take yourself for, anyway, someone superior? You'll get over it, you'll be cured of it, and this, this—he points to my plants—this will soon have an end, what is this insane occupation, this green stuff?" I hold the garden hose in my hand, I could aim a blast of water right in his face, so that he would stop insulting me. . . .
>
> (MA 212).

Here the highly concrete, imagistic prose pits the sensitive young girl against her brutal and bullying father. But in the context of the whole text, we can sense something else happening. If Chapter 1, "Happy with Ivan," can be read as a rebuttal of the "meter-making argument," of traditional lyric, "The Third Man" is a rejection of phanopoeia, of the Poundian notion that it is only the Image which "gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits. . .which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art," and that, accordingly, we should "Go in fear of abstractions."[18] In "The Third Man," to the contrary, the Image as "radiant node or cluster" is regularly associated with deception and false appearances; its concreteness and immediacy becomes cloying and oppressive, belonging, as they do to the surreal landscape of dream in which one refuses to come to terms with the way words are actually used. The colors, as the narrator says, are all wrong.

The poetry of the future, as Bachmann envisions it in her language games, is more abstract and sparer—a poetry that uses ordinary language although, to cite Wittgenstein, that language is not used in the language game of giving information—not, at least, until the very end of the novel when the complete sentences are closed by periods. Until that point, Bachmann's prose is structured *poetically*, although rhetorical figures—repetition, parallelism, antithesis, anaphora—become more important than the tropes of synesthesia and symbolism that characterized the earlier work. Toward the end of "Last Things," the narrator makes one last attempt to call #726893, Ivan's number, a number she can dial in the dark:

> Yes, it's me
> No, only I
> No, really?
> Yes, about to leave
> I'll call you later
> Yes, much later
> I'll call you even later! (MA 310-11)

Later: The ordinary, everyday word is given the poetic charge once reserved for the "storm of roses." But then, who can trust the flowers, the *Schlag*, the lovely melodies and songs of the Vienna of "today"—the "today" whose very mention causes the narrator's heart rhythm to change in the opening pages of *Malina? Later:* the demand is for a new prose that can measure the space between #6 and #9 Ungargasse, a space finally absorbed into a phone number we meet for the first time on the novel's final page: 723144. Now it is only Malina's number even as the novel we have just read bears only his name. But the crack in the wall into which the "I" disappears is the crack of writing, and it is she who is the author of the book.

NOTES

1 Gertrude Stein, "Sentences," *How to Write* (1931; New York: Dover, 1975), pp. 138-39.

2 Stephen Fredman, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1; subsequently cited as SF. A second, revised edition with a new Introduction was published by Cambridge in 1990.

3 An interesting essay on the question of race vis-à-vis poet's prose is Aldon Nielsen's "Black Margins: Rediscovering the African American Prose Poem," presented at the MLA convention in New York, December 1992, and not yet published.

4 Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* (Paris: Verdier, 1982). The Stanford University Press is going to publish a Meschonnic Reader, edited by Gabriella Bedetti, some time in 1993 or '94. But even this book will only contain sections of the *Critique*, which urgently needs translating.

5 Northrop Frye, *The Well-Tempered Critic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 55-93.

6 In an interview of 24 December 1971, Bachmann remarks, "There was a specific moment which destroyed my childhood. The entry of Hitler's troops into Klagenfurt. It was something so terrible, that my memory begins with that day: with that early sorrow, whose intensity was perhaps never to be repeated. Naturally, I didn't understand all this at the time, in the way an adult would understand it. But this enormous brutality, which could be sensed, this screaming, singing and marching—the origin of my fear of death. A whole army intruded on our quiet, peaceful Carinthia." See Bachmann, *Wir Müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* (Munich: R. Pier & Co., 1991), p. 111. Subsequently cited in the text as I. Translations are my own.

7 Paul Celan, "Antwort auf eine Umfrage der Librairie Flinker," Paris (1955), in Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, III (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), p. 167. Translation mine.

8 Ingeborg Bachmann, *Werke*, ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weldenbaum, and Clemens Münster, 4 vols. (Munich: Suhrkamp, 1978): Vol. 1: *Gedichte, Hörspiele, Libretti, Übersetzungen*, p. 56. Subsequently cited as IBW. Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. A valuable bilingual selection of Bachmann's poetry is *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems*, trans. and ed. Mark Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), subsequently cited as MA.

9 In his *Ingeborg Bachmann* (Munich: Beck, 1958), Peter Beicken cites, as possible sources, Klopstock's "Die frühen Gräber," Goethe's "Anakreons Grab," Höltys's "Die Mainacht," Hölderlin's "Abendphantasie," C. F. Meyer's "Wetterleuchten," Trakl's "Das Gewitter" and Rilke's Rose Poems (P. 94). In English, an interesting analogue is the dream-like sequence in Chapter 1 of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, in which the pregnant Mrs. Morel, pushed out the door by her husband after a late-night quarrel, is pursued (and then comforted by) the seemingly gigantic flowers in her garden.

10 I retain Mark Anderson's translation "fremden" = "foreign" here, but it should be noted that "fremden" carries the broader meaning of "strange." A stranger, foreign or otherwise, is "Ein Fremder" in German.

11 Paul Celan, *Poems*, A Bilingual Edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1980), pp. 150-51. Line 7 may be literally translated: "With everything, what has room inside it."

12 Mark Anderson notes that the references to the loved one as female here and elsewhere in Bachmann's poetry has given rise to speculation that hers is a lesbian poetics. He argues, rightly I think, that such speculation is unwarranted, the gender transposition being too obvious and conventional to suggest the homoerotic (MA 8). But it is true that in some of Bachmann's short stories (e.g., "A Step toward Gomorrah") and certainly in *Malina*, gender identity becomes a vexed issue.

13 See MA 12; cf, Interview with Harald Grass, 1 May 1965, I 58; interview with Karol Sauerland, May 1973, I 135-36.

14 Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ludwig Wittgenstein—zu einem Kapitel der jüngsten Philsophiegeschichte," *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik*, July 1953; rpt. IBW, Vol. 3.

15 Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (1971: Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 7-8; subsequently cited in the text as MA. For an English translation, see *Malina*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1990), pp. 1-2; subsequently cited as M. Since the Boehm translation is very loose, I have preferred to translate the citations myself.

16 MA 40. The German punning is on "Tücken" / "Mücken" ("Das Telefon hat eben seine Tücken / Wie? Es redet dauert jemand hinein. Mücken, wieso." "Tics" / "sticks," which I take from Boehm, captures the general sense of the passage.

17 I have translated "glücklich" as "happy" here but "glücklich" has a stronger charge, as in "overjoyed," "delighted," "ecstatic," and so on.

18 Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 4-5.

WALTER BENJAMIN
DREAM KITSCH

(Tr. from the German by Stefan G. Rehm)

One cannot truly dream of the blue flower any more. He who wakes up today as Heinrich von Ofterdingen must have overslept. The history of dreams still remains to be written; and revealing insight in it would mean that historical illumination must decisively defeat the superstition of being inhibited by nature.* Dreaming participates in history. Dream statistics would push forward beyond the sweetness of the anecdotal landscape into the drought of a battle field. Dreams have commanded wars, and wars before primitive times have established right and wrong, indeed the frontiers of dreams.

Dreams no longer open up a blue expanse. They have become gray. The gray layer of dust on things is their best part. Dreams are now a pathway to the banal. Technology cashes into oblivion the external image of things like paper money, which should lose its validity. Now the hand grabs the image once more in a dream and touches familiar contours in a gesture of farewell. It grasps the objects at their most worn-out point. This is not always the most suitable: children do not embrace a glass, they grab onto it. And which side do things present to dreams? Which is this most worn-out point? It is the side which is chafed by custom and garnished with cheap mottos. The side which things present to dreams is kitsch.

The fantasy image of things fall gossiping to the ground as pages of the Leporello picture book, "The Dream." Mottos lie under every page. "Ma plus belle maîtresse c'est la paresse" and "Une médaille vernie pour le plus grand ennui" and "Dans le corridor il y a quelqu'un qui me veut à la mort." The Surrealists have composed such lines and artist friends have drawn up the corresponding picture book. Paul Eluard entitles one "Répétition" on the cover of which Max Ernst has drawn four small boys. They have their backs turned to the reader, the teacher and the teacher's desk and are gazing beyond a balustrade to where a balloon is floating in the air. An

*Benjamin's expression, "Aberglauben der Naturbefangenheit," cannot be easily translated into English. The German word "Befangenheit" has multiple meanings including "shyness, " "prejudice," and "being caught up," which cannot be adequately signified by a single English word.

enormous pencil sways on its tip on the balustrade. The repetition of childish experience suggests: when we were young the uneasy protest against the world of our parents did not yet exist. As children in the middle of this world we showed ourselves superior. In the banal, if we grasp it, we grasp the good, which, you see, lies so very near.

For the sentimentality of our parents, distilled over and over, is enough to arrest the most concrete representation of our feeling. Bitter as bile, the diffuseness of their speech contracts to a wrinkled enigmatic image; the ornamentation of the conversation was replete with the most spiritual intricacies. Therein is the affection of the soul, love, kitsch. "Surrealism is called upon to re-establish the dialogue in its essential truth. The partners are released from the obligations of politeness. He who speaks will deduce no theses. But as a matter of principle the answer doesn't care about the self-love of the speaker. Because words and pictures only count as a springboard for the spirit of the listener." Splendid insights from the surrealist manifesto of Breton. They constitute the formula of dialogical misunderstanding, that is, of what is alive in dialogue. Because "misunderstanding" is the rhythm, with which the only true reality presses into conversation. The more realistically a person knows how to speak/ the more successfully people misunderstand him.

In "Vague de rêves" Louis Aragon reports how the mania to dream spread throughout Paris. The young people believed that they had found a secret of poetry—in reality they brought an end to poetry, as all of the most intensive minds of that time. Saint Paul-Roux attached a sign to his door in the early hours of the morning before going to sleep: "Le poète travaille." All this in order to penetrate into the heart of abolished things. In order to decipher the contours of the banal as a picture puzzle, to disturb a hidden "Wilhelm Tell" out of the wooded entrails, or to be able to respond to the question "Where is the bride?" psychoanalysis has long since exposed picture puzzles as schematisma of dreamwork. The Surrealists are certainly less on the trail of the soul than of things. They search for the totem pole of objects in the thicket of pre-historical times. The last, the uppermost grotesque face on this totem pole is kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, with which we dress ourselves in dreams and conversation, in order to gather up in ourselves the power of the extinct world of things.

That which we called art only begins at a two meter distance from the body. But now, in kitsch, the world of things moves toward the human being. This world surrenders itself to his groping touch and ultimately forms its figures inside of him. The new man has all the quintessence of the old forms within himself, and that which takes shape in the argument with an environment of the second half of the nineteenth century, in dreams as in words and images of certain artists, is a being which should be called the "furnished man."

C.J. KEEP
X, Y AND Z

She is losing people. She realizes while copying the names and phone numbers from an old address book into a new one. Some of the entries were first written down five or six years ago, the ink now fading into the thinning paper. Looking at the well-thumbed pages, she counts the names that have slipped away, the numbers that can no longer be dialled by heart. Under "M" alone there are three. Four, if you count the Muffler Man she used to take her car to.

She turns the page looking to see if names beginning with any one letter are more likely to go missing. It seems that names on particular pages are more susceptible. Counting the casualties, she begins to suspect that there is some pattern here, that some letters of the alphabet, like people of certain blood types, do not live as long as others. Being listed under "S" seems a certain death sentence, only one name survives from the seven entries crammed between the narrow lines.

Some of the entries she barely recognizes, can only vaguely recall how or why she knew them. Some are just numbers with no names attached, scribbled on the backs of pages or in the corners, others are only first names or initials, as if they only needed these fragments of nomination to announce their importance. She turns the pages, not bothering to transcribe them into her new book. But there are some names she pauses over, wondering whether to save them. She regrets now having never found out the surname of Susan Who Used To Go Out With Alan's Roommate Whatever His Name Was. Perhaps if she hadn't had to list her under "S" they might still know each other.

Only the listing for "XYZ" is unaffected. Two names. Alan Young. Mari Zeitlin. She wonders if they have some rare gene, some singular variation of the DNA code, that makes them immune. Both sexes start out as females, she remembers; ribbons of paired X chromosomes forming a double helix. In the sixth week of gestation a Y chromosome may attach itself to the twenty third pair and the foetus begins to develop male characteristics. Otherwise it remains a female. XX is a girl, XY a boy. There is something in these letters.

She writes out their names and numbers in the new book. Very different people, Mari and Alan. She's dark-haired, but dyes it darker, swears she'd never sleep with a man whose thighs are smaller than hers, can beat just about any one in a staring contest. He's pale, addicted to nasal spray, carries a photograph of John F. Kennedy in his wallet, seems to live for the chance to make weak coffee for other people. Is there some chromosomal link, some XYZ combination that has put them on this page, fusing them to the genetic horizon of the telephone directory?

She reaches for the city phone book to look up some other XYZ's, wondering if the phone company just reprints these same pages year after year knowing of their peculiar immunity. Flipping through the pages, she hums the ABC song and pauses at the occasional unlikely entry that catches her eye. She once knew a guy who could never wait for the new phone book to arrive. As soon as he got it he'd open it up and look up his own name. He said he was just checking to see if they spelled it right. But when you asked to borrow the phone book to order a pizza or something, it always opened up to the page with his name on it.

She looks up his name, but cannot find it among the several hundred listings of the same surname. Then checks the one common alternative spelling, not quite remembering which one he used, but does not find it there either. Perhaps he has moved, she thinks. Or changed his name. Or maybe just the spelling. That's all it would take.

She looks back at her address book. All these missing people. All these people she misses. Maybe there is some way to find them. Posters on bus shelters and grainy graduation photos on the sides of milk cartons will not work. They're not missing that way. They didn't disappear from the school yard one bright winter day. No late model sedan was seen in the vicinity, no bearded man in his thirties is sought in connection with the case. It's not like that. It's just she stopped running into him at the library, forgot to send her a Christmas card, was fired from that job, felt awkward about what happened with her boyfriend, became less tolerant of sports talk, developed an allergy to Siamese cats, couldn't afford to drink imported beer. Or none of those and nothing in particular. They simply drifted out of touch.

But they are missing now all the same.

She goes out and buys another address book. Into this one she copies the names of all the people that had faded from the columns and escaped to the edges of the pages of the first. A book of missing persons. It is not easy, many of the names have become indecipherable with time. Her handwriting of several years ago appears foreign, numbers once jotted down in a bar with a dying pen seem almost hieroglyphic. And there are other problems. Should Nina go in the second book or the first? It's been a long time since they last spoke. How long do you have to wait before someone is classified as missing?

The two books look the same: wallet-sized, black covers with the year embossed in gilt in the upper right hand corner. Alphabetical tags at the edge of each page. But there is something different about this second book. She turns the pages, the binding already loose from use, contemplating these mnemonic spaces. She studies the names, trying to conjure up the people to whom they belong, repeats them to herself as if their very sound could somehow call them back.

There must be some way of finding them. She doesn't want to have coffee, or catch up on old times or exchange numbers. It's not like that. She would just like to know that they're still somewhere out there, to feel them just out of reach, trembling at the edge of her sight.

She begins by looking in the newspapers. Buys a local and a national paper and reads each thoroughly, looking to find some mention of one of the many names in her book. Begins with the marriage announcements, obituaries, letters to the editor. Then crowd photos: baseball games, protest marches and labour union strikes. Scans the personal ads, paying particular attention to the ones placed by people looking for other people. Everyone seems to be looking for some one. SWF seems particularly popular. So does GWM. Many seek the same. Acronyms searching for other acronyms.

She devises other search methods. Sympathetic vibration. Tries eating the same breakfast cereal as Elaine (Spoon Size Shredded Wheat), opening pop cans the way Steven does (tapping it twice near the pull tab), wearing the same red high top sneakers as Aliyah, washing the dishes like her despotic ex-roommate Janet.

She goes to the library and borrows all the books on millenarian sects of the middle ages. For months they had sat on the kitchen table she shared with Amanda. Each morning she'd put them on the floor so the toaster could be plugged in. When the toast popped up Amanda would come into the kitchen, put them back on the table and have breakfast. In the binding there are still crumbs. She reads the sections her friend underlined in red. The cryptic comments on apostasy scrawled in the margins now seem like messages sent to her from another time.

One night while watching a tv documentary on the life of Adolf Hitler, she finds her high school locker partner Klaus. They are showing a photo from 1925, a huge crowd of people gathered out front of the Reichstag denouncing Hindenburg's election as president of the Weimar Republic. The camera zooms in and against the blur of faces they put a white circle around a young Hitler, waving his fist. Hardly recognizable without the moustache. The voice over continues, but she is not listening. Next to Hitler, wearing the same grey overcoat he wore in school, is Klaus. The two of them seem to be in conversation. This is surprising as Klaus was not born until at least thirty years later after the picture was taken. But she is happy to see him again.

In a record store she finds a live album by a band she used to like, is surprised to find that she was there the night that it was recorded. Andrew took her. He went to all the concerts, mostly just to make that whooping sound he always made. She always stood a few feet a way from him so people wouldn't think they were together. She listens to the record carefully, trying to pick out his shouts from the rest, playing the bits between the songs over and over again, trying to detect his presence there in the crowd, to hear the subtle eddies in sound that his body must have caused.

Weeks later, she assesses the results of her search efforts. She now hates Spoon Size Shredded Wheat. People compliment her footware. Her dishes are very clean. The needle on her record player is broken. There is newsprint ink on her face.

On Tuesday the phone rings. It's Andrew. It's been years. He got her number from Nina who says she's sorry she hasn't called but she will, no really she will. They talk. It's nice but she barely listens, a part of her wanting to hang up the phone. She tells him she's real busy just now, work and all, but she'll call him sometime. Yes, she still has his number. Sure. Okay. Bye.

She hangs up and looks for the address book that contains all her current numbers. It's under a stack of newspapers. She flips to the page marked with the letter "D" and adds his name to the list. Her book of missing persons is in the bag she always carries with her. She takes it out, finds his name there draws several dark lines through it. The tops of some of the letters still show. She draws two more lines so that it is completely covered. Looks back at the first book. Wonders if there is somebody she could add from it to the second, considers which name she wouldn't mind losing. Several come to mind. She'd have to avoid them assiduously. But it wouldn't be the same.

She places the two books side by side on the table, trying to feel out the hidden point of intersection between them. Somewhere here is the precise tip of their balance. Names from the second can only come from names that were once in the first. Names from the second can return to the first, but eventually everyone will be in the second, everyone will end up missing. The one is already the other. The phone rings again. She looks from it to the address books. And again. Outside her window a car is parked, its engine still running. Nuclei begin their backward sprawl, dividing and redividing, mitosis spinning new pairs of chromosomes in the alphabetical combinations of need. And again. She closes her books and sits perfectly still, counting the number of rings.

JED RASULA

PINATERRPARE DTAOTIXON

homage, N.O.B., & in memory of Harvey Brown

"We should speak of 'the Strange' as we speak of Space and Time. . ." (Valéry, *Analects* p. 291)

The paradox of relation:

you = 1
I = 1
1 = 1
BUT: you ≠ me

The paradox is 2, twofold; folded in two.
"There are no protective railings to the act of love. The twoness of oneness is the railings themselves." (Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens-Plastique* p. 87)

"Wo es war, soll ich werden": Freud's motto[1] a pledge of Hermes. By stealth and cunning, there in the sacred chamber where it is wedged securely, I will be be. It will be me. The world will be my deictic paradox.

Deixis: the paradox that identity is the achievement of alterity. Benveniste calls terms of deixis "empty signs," terms without meaning except in a context (like *here, there, now, you, me. . .*). Deixis affords a palpable sensation of the unlived within the lived, the unknown within the known, the empty or non-being within the parameters of incarnation.

The *Cogito:* "I am" is the original Other.

". . .language is an operational superstructure on an erotic base." (Brown, *Life Against Death* p. 69) Language is the paradox that makes play work, that makes work play or perform the earnestness of its purpose or intent, makes it *intent.* Intense.

Nomen est omen: the word is an omen. Interpretation of the ominous. In the ominous the numinous awaits.

"All communication has this characteristic—it can be magically modified by accompanying communication." (Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* p. 230)

"Magic is the power possessed by autonomous beings, and autonomy is the defining characteristic of the subject. Objects of themselves can never possess the numen, since they are not autonomous, but merely functions at the effect of some other cause. If an object emanates the numen, it is the locus of a living presence. *Numen* (from the root *nu-*) is the nod by which the gods assert, by consent or refusal, their autonomous will. The numinous, wherever it occurs, and whatever the form, marks the encounter with the real." (Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* p.15)

To encounter the real is to be marked, embellished, set apart, magically modified. *Named.*

A personal name, omen of the numinous person. "Paradise is a person. Come into this world." (Olson, *Maximus* p. 240)

Names are nods; orders and commands. *Tabula Rasula.* I must have blanked out.

Theoretical perspectives are rules, *regula*, for measuring the span or distance of traversal required by an interpretive act. Geometries of free-fall. Spin of the numinous. Those vertigo erotics.

Zeno's paradox of space as an infinitely diminishing (but never expiring) distance testifies to a breakdown of the surveyor's tool, which is a mechanism for:

traversing the distance,
filling the space,
marking the time.

Interpretation is bound up with *ego* and with *eros.*
Where do I stand,
and how does it feel?

And when did it happen? Plato's conundrum of temporality, from the *Parmenides* (141:a-b): "Whatever occupies time must always be becoming older than itself, and 'older' always means older than something younger. Consequently, whatever is becoming older than itself, if it is to have something *than* which it is becoming older, must also be at the same time becoming younger than itself."

We read personally but interpret impersonally.

My likes and inclinations (as in Barthes' "pleasure of the text") can be taxonomized, but in the interpretive occasion personal references too easily become esoteric, and what is esoteric adds complexity, but also

depth, the depth of secrecy. The deep secret that is open to the world, a purloined letter, obvious. Latin *obvius* from *obviam*, in or against the way: we go around or avoid the obvious, it is in the way, but beneath attention. There where we failed to attend, attention leaks away, forming a reservoir of inattention, fathom upon fathom, unfathomable.

Silence is an attribute of a relation.
Secrecy is a function of interpretation.

Instrumental reason falters when you add, to the complexity of knowing things, the additional burden of having to know *people*.

A dream can be interpreted, because dreams never survive their noisy channels intact (the dreamer flooded with the somatic sensation of there *having been* more than can be told or even recalled). But a living person? To interpret a person is to posit the obsolescence of the person; and sure enough, people obligingly vanish into our interpretations of them. (An interpretation effaces relation.)

What is neglected are the terms of relation, Whitman's very simple "Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem. . ." ("To You") You—you empty deictic cipher you—forget that the text is a laying on of hands, and that {we:you:who} are what has been touched. Moved. Mobilized. (mumblemumble)

We recognize "classics" by the circumambient swarm of parasites, "thermal exciters." (Michel Serres, *The Parasite* p. 190)

In the laborious endeavor of this literary parasitology, "meaning" is gained under oppressive constraints and is associated with parsimony; or it appears all too easily, even frenetically, and acquires attributes of promiscuity.

"The perception of a general condition of insufficiency is refracted through a prism of choices." (Nikos Xenos, *Scarcity and Modernity* p. 1) Xenos is talking about capitalism and the myth of scarcity, but the statement applies to language theory as well. Consider nihilistic strains of modernism: a prodigious stylistic exactitude renders meaninglessness palpable, even euphoric; the void gnaws like a phantom pregnancy in the wombs of words.

Interpretation of texts is not so different from quantum mechanics: we still strive to locate its position (relative to generic coordinates)
its mass (displacement of cognitive space)
its velocity (momentum in the sociocultural plane).

Quantum mechanics deals with probabilities, with mass tendencies rather than with individual events. "Literature" is a generalization, a statistical tendency of the sort described by quantum mechanics.

Literature creates the statistical milieu—the field of predominant *tendencies*— within which individual texts are transformed into *messages*. The institutional study of literature becomes the statistical task of distinguishing the messages from noise.

The Copenhagen Interpretation stipulates a *domain of suitable reference*, which is that of the observer['s scale, dimension of the observer's milieu and points of reference, etc.]. It understands interpretation in terms of its pragmatic origins. Each time we seek knowledge of something "in itself" we learn something, instead, about the desire to elaborate frames of reference to "things in themselves." That is, we learn something if we take the position of the Copenhagen Interpretation; otherwise, we learn the caustic lessons of scepticism, and feel ourselves to be the dupes of experiments not conducted by us, but *on* us, by mindless or senseless forces outside our control (and what better definition could the sceptic desire of a "thing in itself" but a mindless or senseless force outside our control!).

The Copenhagen Interpretation testifies to the terrific mobility of psychological *projection*.

"The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves." Jung, *Aion* (CW IX:2, p. 71)

The sign, the vessel, breaks.

Prophecy is an eruption of the sacred into interpretable form, bypassing the semiotic function of profane textuality. Prophecy requires interpretation in defiance of semiosis. Semiosis is the re- assertion of the primacy of signs, otherwise known as *idolatry*.

The secular text encourages interpretation because it is convivial, accessible, profane. *Pro fanum*, before the temple. The profane text pretends to be a shrine, proposing the word as a tiny pulpit. (Where it gets kinky is in the pretense that a prophetic voice is being emitted from behind the pulpit, which is made out to be an orchestra pit.)

Breakage, crumble, multiplication of an enigma, which grows as it comes apart, expends in decrease until emptiness is swollen. A rent in the

normal where the numen pokes through. A phantom delegation bearing a ( ) debt which no blank check can ever transact.

"Your money or your life," as Lacan was fond of saying, is the impossible claim of identity. It is also the interpretive paradox, the constitutive ambiguity of twoness, the way meaning and being are never quite synchronized, but caught up in the webs of signification and desire, stretched across what Gerhard von Rad called the critical minimum and the theological maximum.

Interpretation as a tradition (hermeneutics) derives from the reading of scriptures, sacred—and secret—texts. Interpretation is an unfolding of the revealed (as if it were crumpled in transit; or pieced together after being shattered—hence the sacred obligations of symbolism, symbol as part to be matched with other parts, pieced together to restore a whole, a *hyle* or "form" of the holy). No matter how well we put it together it isn't the same (And all the king's horses and all the king's men. . .); its identity, its sameness, is different, no longer orthodox but paradox.

Roy Wagner in *Symbols That Stand For Themselves* speaks of "symbolic obviation," by which he means figure/ground reversals. Symbolic obviation is the flow of analogy from a "point metaphor" to a "frame metaphor." Or: from significant detail to enframing event.

G. Spencer Brown proposes four steps for the "expansion of reference": *condensation, confirmation, cancellation,* and *compensation.* In an explanation that seems to derive from the systole/diastole model, Brown says: "In general, a contraction of reference accompanies an expansion of awareness, and an expansion of reference accompanies a contraction of awareness." *(Laws of Form* p. 10)

Expansion and *contraction* are the bodily frames of both yoga and tai ch'i. The point of both practices is to liberate consciousness from helpless oscillation between expansion and contraction, to get stabilized in *tao* (tai ch'i) or *samadhi* (yoga). Going with the breath, its respirating frame your only signature. Its sign your nature.

The esoteric challenge of sacred texts often leads to paradox.

Literary theory has not, on the whole, been disposed to recognize the inevitable paradox that awaits interpretation. Paradox is thus mistaken as a "constitutive ambiguity" of the text, as evidence of interpretive reverberation and echo (Mrs. Moore in the Marabar caves *[Passage to India]:* the adamantine mockery of human voices), or testimony to the endless slide of signification, the lubricated delirium of the sign.

The prevailing fears of interpretative nervousness: coitus interruptus and premature ejaculation.

Interpretation, always pretending to discuss the "text," expose a "rhetoric," delineate a "theme," specify patterned "form," paradoxically ends up instead obsessed with names.

The goal of interpretation should be to clarify the paradox.

Not simply en-lighten, with its teleology of Enlightenment (Aufklärung), but to become light-hearted, *leuchtherzig*, or *fröhlich*, the Nietzschean opiate *[Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* or Gay Science] for heads "enlightened" into robotic craniums. To *re-make* the mistake. Seize the flaw.

Mistakes are revelations.

Interpretation often seeks to heal the text of its mistakes, its *petite mal*, its tiny seizures. Its coughs, sneezes, stutters. Its limp.

Limp: Limbp. Legba's legs—one foot in each world, heaven and earth—make a discordant sound when he walks.

The hermeneutic correction: outfit him for a prosthesis. Provide corrective symmetry. But then there would be no revelation, no oracle, no prophecy.

Legba's genius: each leg makes its own sound. (Two does not exist: every pair is one + one.) Legba: god of gates and doors, fences and boundaries, also patronizes roads and paths. Not only the block, but the break. A paradox. Testament to the uncanny potency of junctions, spooked transitions of empowerment. (Robert Johnson at the crossroads.) Enabler of masterful transgressions. "Legba is the divine linguist," master of a "unique dialectic, the copula in each sentence. . . He has sexual relations with any woman he chooses because these boundaries—physical, social, religious, and even metaphysical—dissolve and reform in his presence." (Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa* p. 88)

In Haiti Legba's associated with St. Peter, because the saint holds the keys to the kingdom. There (as well as for the Fon of West Africa— and in European alchemical lore[2]) Legba's an old man in rags, with a crutch: "pied cassé" or broken-foot.

Oedipus, too, with prophecies said to "flutter about his head" like birds, hobbles as his name instructs, "Swellfoot."

It's as if those feet were swollen with eyes, compensating for the mutilation. Emerson: "I become a transparent eyeball. . ." The eyes continue Ezekiel's vision (1:18) of the heavenly chariot, its inter- revolving wheels "were full of eyes round about." And in Zach. 4:10 the "eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth." Jung referred to such symbols of "multiple

luminosities of the unconscious," and "the seeming possibility that complexes possess a kind of consciousness, a luminosity of their own, which, I conjecture, expresses itself in the symbol of the soul-spark, multiple eyes *(polyophthalmia)*, and the starry heaven." (CW XIV: 207)

To lighten. Make light of. To arouse elation, buoyant ascension.

Legba, Esu Elegbara, god of the crossroads, "loosens knowledge." (Henry Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* p. 9) Get loose, lighten up.

Resolution as laughter. The goal of interpretation is *to air out*, to ventilate, to expend stale accumulation with a laugh. Not to ascertain meaning, not place or fix or determine it, but *uncork it.*

Laughter is the sneeze of the soul.

"Procreation and sneezing appear to be the distinctive manifestations of the *psyche.* Here, then, strange as it may seem, must be sought the origin of the name, if its nearest kin be *psuxein*, 'to blow'." (R.B. Onians *The Origins of European Thought* p. 120)

Bird could even blow on the nod.

When you read and find yourself nodding off, Hermes is on his way to guide you to an underworld, a subtext.

For the Greeks, a contractual arrangement was signed by a nod, pledged in the name of psyche. "A sneeze is also a nod, a nod not expected or controlled by the conscious self but an apparently spontaneous expression of the life in the head." (Onians p. 104)

The sanctity of the sneeze: prophecy. Nodding is interpreting prophetic texts. Or: a nod indicates the prophecy, the kerygmatic annunciation, of the text. Al-chymia's chimera.

The ointments, the facilitators. Regulators. In the *Koran* the angelic beings: "those who repulse" "those who recite" "those who distribute" "those who are sent" "those who disperse" "those who seize" "those who extract gently" "those who precede" "those who float" "those who deliver the word" "those who conduct the cosmic tasks" "those arrayed in order"

Everything written on the sacrosanct Tablet needs these angels for its actualization. In the mystical alphabet of the Dhauqi branch of the Chishtiyya Sabiriyya the pronounced letters are lunar mansions.

"Man's heart is between two of God's fingers, and He turns it as He pleases," a Muslim adage has it. What is written takes many forms. So "One has to cultivate, first of all, the eye to see the selfsame reality of ink in all letters, and then to see the letters as so many intrinsic modifications of the ink." (Haydar-i Amuli [d. 1385], quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* p. 89)

"As long as Oedipus is the protagonist on the stage, we are not Oedipus. Let his terrible secret be exposed to the whole world, provided we can leave the theater with our secret intact. Myth is a powerful hypnotic, in which cultures inscribe their own ideology, and the mythologist's task is certainly to discover the little secrets that one ideology or another hides away in the folds of myth.

But myth also reveals that which was to be concealed. Like our dreams, which seem to disguise our secrets to protect our sleep, myth keeps confessing the very secrets that it was constructed to conceal. With a chorus of signifiers it circles around the traumatic rupture, where the subject vanished into the field of the Other." (Norman Austin, *ibid.*, 23)

One correction: The mythologist's true "task" is not to discover but to dislodge the secrets (the more unintentionally the better) which flutter up, buoyant, like motiis.

The numinous is creaturely presence. Secrets are creatures.

The numinous is creaturely presence. Secrets are creatures.
Little secrets "hidden away in the folds of myth": Myths are the genitals of the collective unconscious.
Is "collective unconscious" an oxymoron? Unconscious is *uncollected consciousness.* Consciousness in its *menstruum universale* and its *dissemination* is endlessly dispersed, "unconcealed," but scattered, lost, bereft (the paradigmatic phallic disorder: post-coitum tristum, yearning for "full presence"). Myth is tumescence and flow, the waxing and waning of cosmogenesis, fecundating psyche.

In the *Aitreya Upanishad* (1.4): "[The Self] heated that one (i.e. Purusa, 'Man'). When it was heated, its mouth broke off, like an egg. From the mouth, there was speech; from speech, fire. Its nostrils broke off. From the eyes, there was vision; from vision, the sun. Its ears broke off. From the ears, there was hearing; from hearing, the four quarters. Its skin broke off. From the skin, there was bodily hair; from the bodily hair, plants and trees. Its heart broke off. From the heart, there was mind; from mind, the moon. Its navel broke off. From the navel, there was the downward (anal) breath; from the downward breath, death. Its penis broke off. From the penis, there was semen; from semen, the waters."

Ananse, the Ashanti trickster, has his children disorient a rival by having them inform him that their father broke his penis in seven places, and went to a blacksmith for repairs. The rival asks where their mother is; they reply that she went to the river to fetch water, and her pot would have been broken but she caught it just in time. However, she didn't quite finish catching it and has gone back to do so.

Dizzy tales; understanding them brings on dizziness.
When we speak of language, we should speak of THE WHIRRED.
"As the Word Turns."

"An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties." (Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* p. 111)

"In matters of art, and particularly of artistic perception, it is wrong to want to *decide*, to want to *resolve* a difficulty." Aesthetic perception plays at the limits of an irresolution, as if a binocular apparatus were never quite focused, its images visibly doubled, shadowing each other in ocular reverberation. "Thus, very often the urge to interpret results from optical illusion. . ." (Fredric Jameson, "Metacommentary" in *Ideologies of Theory* Vol. 1, p. 4)

We can't view the surface of life and see through it simultaneously. This is Gombrich's paradox of illusion: ". . .for though we may be intellectually aware of the fact that any given experience *must* be an illusion, we cannot, strictly speaking, watch ourselves have an illusion." *(Art and Illusion* pp. 5-6) We can't know what the watcher or observer knows without becoming observers ourselves, which means extricating ourselves from the plenitude of the illusion. Wittgenstein's comment on never finding the word on the tip of our tongue may refer to this paradox: what if we were always shadowed, doubled, and perplexed by the binocular irresolution, the fact that knowledge or self-awareness always detaches us from immersion in the sensory manifold that is precisely the condition and object of awareness?

Aisthesis means: we need the illusion, we require illusion in order to see. Illusion generates certainty by arresting reflex, staging prognoses, evolving a future conditional out of the present tense. (cf. Gombrich "Illusion and Art") Sidney's "second nature" is not confined to art alone, but is the composite of our sensory abilities pausing at *is* to extract *perhaps*.

The Western affliction is the inability to absorb (the certainty of) illusion into discourse *as* its residual epistemology.

There is illusion. There is doubt.

You can only doubt the substantive; there's no doubting an illusion, for that would be to sustain the impossible adventure of watching yourself have an illusion. Therefore you can only doubt the *certainty of illusion*.

Nihilism is the conjugal strife between illusion and disillusion. (It's interesting that in English "disillusion" is a negative state, implying, for all its bad press, that "illusion" is a gratifying condition.)

"'Darkness is deep,' the Eye says.
'Silence is deep,' the Ear says.
What *is not* is the 'depth' of *what is*.'" (Valéry, *Analects* p. 308)

Jubilate Agno: seize the daydream; celebrate the trauma.

Pathic versus instrumental utilities.

There are two styles of pathologizing—of sensing, of feeling, the logos:

(1) the metonymic agony: paranoia. Paranoia is the agony of having to interpret without having been privy to the rules or codes of the game. Paranoia is confronting an interpretive process already underway, a situation that is de facto ahead of you, and to which you are a belated non-initiate. Paranoia is a disfunction of the phantom temporality of the gap: something is unfolding in time, but you are always situated at the *wrong time.*

(2) the paradigmatic agony: schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is the agony of having to suffer interpretation as the immaculate compression or concentration of the total code—*all* the rules of the game—as a single, totalizing, yet interior hermeneutic/heuristic injunction. If the metonymic agony arouses a "contiguity illusion" (cf. Pignatari in Sebeok 1978), then the paradigmatic agony precipitates a "simultaneity illusion." Schizophrenia is a disfunction of the phantom spatiality of the gap, the sensation of which is to internalize the entire spatial feel of the gap or figural space, which is simply too big, so splitting results. The agony is the double one of being situated at the right place, but being forced to take in or contain too much to fit into the right place, so part of one is always elsewhere, in the *wrong place.*

In Jakobson's terms, the *similarity disorder* is the loss of grip on code, resulting in context-dependency. *Contiguity disorder* is loss of grip on context, in which a strong associative syntaxis survives.

Rhyme is a standing invitation to contiguity disorder (see Swinburne's evocative erosion of context through fanaticism of rhyme).

Metaphor is orphanage.

Metonymy is amputative: restoration by proximity and immediacy (grow another word).

Seizure: "I had started to go back to the beginnings of a sense of an aura in language, to a rhythmic and tonal seizure in words where I suddenly found I was not using language but used by language, not saying something I meant to say but being carried away to things I had not thought to say—amazed or ashamed of what I was saying." (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* p. 126) Like Psyche, carried away to her "wish palace." And the wicked sisters— "Let's *blow* this joint" —head over the cliff, waiting in vain for love's sirocco.

Ecstasy is the prophecy of obliteration. Breath is the prophecy of speech.

Knowing feelings; versus feeling knowing get away from you.

Spencer Brown unfolds an algebra and a calculus of forms from a single mark in space, which he calls "the first distinction." When the distinction is apprehended not as a semiotic mark but as a split, a rupture, then the distinction is interpreted as if it were a broken connection. This is *pathology*, or *feeling the mark*.

Brown's "distinction" instantly posits an observer at the interface, with a prosthesis as instrumentalizing tactility.

The function of syllogism in Spencer Brown's laws of form: no distinction can be made once (i.e. being and meaning and not conflatable), therefore the initial distinction is unthinkable; to come to cognition of it, the distinction must be marked twice, rendered duplicitous.

This level of duplicity—duplexity—is the kernel of information theory, in which information is coded multiply to compete with ambient noise in the channel. The message repeated twice stands a greater chance of arriving intact at its destination.

But what does it do to the semantic resonance of a message to be repeated twice (or many times)? It becomes canonized, *if* a sufficient number of its repetitions survive transmission.

"Canonization," in Brown's logic, is "the form of condensation." A canonical text is an aching syllogism. It must be known twice to be known once, or known *as one*. Pathology is the awareness of irresolution, of states in which two are one or one is two, in which the binocular focus cannot be resolved into the illusion of one stable view.

A break is an opportunity. (He got all the breaks. A fast break)

"Creation seemed a mighty Crack
To make me visible." (Emily Dickinson)

Illumination: something burns so bright that what it illuminates is actually obscured: the eye is "blinded" by the light, its *incandescence*.

There is also *sonorescence*. "In our sonorescence, nature and artifice compose each other's excesses and their excesses." (Stephen Ross, *The Ring of Representation* p. 211) This "reciprocal excess" is a habitation in doubling which seems inevitably a mark of mind, a notch in matter.

In music, "The note began as something which was pulling and stretching, but does it want to go on like this?" (Ernst Block, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* p. 228) The function of time in music is as undertow,

to make the instantaneous felt as re-iteration, the doing as done again; the instrument itself a timer, taking the pulse of the place. (Note is tone.)

Valéry: "By the indirect route of musical stimuli I am, in some strange fashion, combined with myself." "I seem to experience all this, for actually I cannot tell whether I am subject or object. . ." (*Analects* p. 268, 269)

Senses awaken; stretch, rouse. Aroused, they multiply. Each sense exercising its autonomy, gnawing, gnawing. "I 'thought' and desired in my fingers. If I had made a man, I should certainly have put the brain and soul in his fingertips." (Helen Keller, *The World I Live In* p. 116)

Rotundity. The bell of the horn. The dome of the rock. The sonorescent cupola of a solo driven by *duende* darkens the listener's pulse, even as it "consults" the wind (as Lorca says of *cante jondo [Deep Song and Other Prose* p. 84]). The pregnant pause; and the billowing skirt on the line in the wind. The vibrating garment becomes, at a distance, an eye. Even sound may visit *Polyophthalmia.*

Spiritual correspondences seek equilibrium as attunement rather than cessation or cancellation of opposites. So, in Islamic alchemy, "without the idea of the *balance*, there can be no worlds in correspondence with each other." "The science of the Balance spatializes the succession of time by substituting for the order of succession the order of simultaneity, the unity of the 'cupolas'. . ." (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* p. 80, 81)

"Yet, having reached the *interior*, one finds oneself paradoxically on the *outside*. . . Yet, strange as it may seem, once the journey is completed the reality which has hitherto been an inner and hidden one turns out to envelop, surround, or contain that which at first was outer and visible." (Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis," *Spring* 1972 p. 5)

"Spiritual reality can therefore not be found 'in the where.' The *'where'* is in it."

> As Lightning on a Landscape
> Exhibits Sheets of Place—
> Not yet suspected—but for Flash—
> And Click—and Suddenness. (Dickinson #974)[3]

Desire encases language in the duplexity of conscious/ unconscious.
Symbol cements this bifurcation into the enigma of incarnation.
Desire says "one," to which desire adds "two," together making three.

A symbol is a door, an opening, a passageway.
Mouth: tongue: vulva: urethra: nested frames, limits, *tao.*

This is why genitals signify, abide as symbols. Phallus and vulva signify each other, in addition to manifesting their own inscrutable singularity:

The mystery of a one that is nothing without an other (1 = 0) but, two taken together, equal one (1 + 1 = 1) which resolve, genetically, into the final *mysterium tremendum*, the shudder of procreation: *another* one, a multiple (1 x 1 = 3).

the symbol is the ouroboros

through whose hoop we

shake our hips

grin & wiggle

devour the worm

skim lava from the krater

gulp from the bottomless drop

at love in the weird of the founder

Pascal: "I had a thought. I have forgotten it. In its place I write that I've forgotten it."

What if the notion you thought you'd never remember returned to you in all its fullness, integrity, coherence, and it was:

"What if closure, coherence, and mastery kept on repeating itself, insinuating its finality to us, not in narrative form or eschatological vision, but as a logic of the sentence, the paradigm of grammar itself?"

What if words themselves were sparrows pecking Zeuxis' grapes?

So all the animals peeled themselves and turned into drums, stretching their skins for the heads of the drums, and each of these heads could think.

(René Thom: "Thought is a permanent orgasm.")

BLUSHING IN THE GARDEN OF THE ANIMAL

ruptures in the skin of fruit
split open as muzzles or snouts

as ever as you & many
as you & me
were lifted up through the vowel of a
cloud
known as "Unknown"

to *thud* to *said* to whether & went

such honeys rubbing the skin of the drums

what are all these words doing
coming up around me all around me

the necklace of apocrypha
blowing off the oceanic vault

the brain inside the stone
through which my stone knocks back

enormous persons begin appearing
appearing in the pale egg of day, an air, an hour

hands were inserted & look—
sleep washed them

"Blue Moses" shined the bowl
(did The Lion change my face?)

I'm talking to You the
only one at a time

a carnival sleek in pubis
a chlorophyll bass clarinet

the slumber of bodily organs clasping the house
in a low cirrus swoon, tufts of the chakras

in bowls of marigolds, savor the
rasa eros kink in the mask

wherever we are
however we either
whoever we or

Notes

1 "Where id was, there ego will be." Bob Marley: "feel it in the one drop" . . . in Mahayana Deity Yoga, cognition of emptiness sustained through contemplation of a reflective gleam on an earring, inside of which all the commotion of the lords of existence appears in fabulous proliferation, congealed in a drop, the wholesome zero.

2 See Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618), Emblem XLII, with its accompanying epigram: "Let Nature be your guide, and with your art / Follow her closely. Without her you'll err. / Let reason be your staff; experience lend / Power to your sight, that you may see afar. / Let reading be your lamp, dispelling dark, / That you may guard 'gainst throngs of things and words." (Joscelyn Godwin trans., 1989) The term "alchemy" comes from several Sanskrit roots emphasizing blackness, nigredo: au I / gheu / kers II. **Au I** = down, and is rooted in "avatar" (au ter = cross over). Vishnu's avatars include Rama and Krishna, both of which mean *black* in Sanskrit. Krishna is **kers II**, black. In Egypt the Nile's black flood effluvia is *khem*. **Gheu** = pour, in Greek *khein*. Juice is *khulos* and *khumos*. Chemistry's chums, the black gods and patrons. Flooders.

3 In *Etidorhpa* (1895) by John Uri Lloyd (Cincinnati pharmacist): "As the tip of the whip-lash passes with the lash, so through life the soul of man proceeds with the body. As there is a point just when the tip of the whip-lash is on the edge of its return, where all motion of the line that bounds the tip ends, so there is a motionless point when the soul starts onward from the body of man. As the tip of the whip lash sends its cry through space, not while it is in motion either way, but from the point where motion ceases, the spaceless, timeless point that lies between the backward and the forward, so the soul of man leaves a cry (eternity) at the critical point. It is the death echo, and thus each snap of the life-thread throws an eternity, its own eternity, into eternity's seas, and each eternity is made up of the entities thus cast from the critical point." It could even be called a *diacritical* point. Spencer Brown's "distinction" or "mark."

JEROME ROTHENBERG SECTION

DEMOSTHENES AGRAFIOTIS
from THE CHINESE NOTEBOOK

(Translations from the Greek were composed by the author and Theo Dorgan, Tony Curtis, Pat Boran, and Kate Newman at the Seminar of Collective Translation, the Tyrone Guthrie Center, Ireland, from the 22nd to the 29th of November, 1992.)

Page 9

the common enemy
scurrying, marshalling

again and again

prophecies and disease

the rodents
open other circles.

Page 15

the gesture
does not recognize
last minute cartographies
scaffolding of theories
panickers.

Page 18

the lips follow the eyelids

cultivated on the face
plants
contents
sequences of signs.

Page 19

cultivator of paintings and erections

cheap, artificial glance
the tongue unlocks and does not let
/.

Page 28

despised masks
subsumed
in claims to dignity
during family toasts

no not me me

blackmail.

Page 36

night of the museum
unexploited by lamps

no appeal

movements become
difficult
and blood
without passing through vessels
is guided to sheet music

every smile
counterpoint
to taxonomy of the indigenous

the traces
breed representations.

Page 39

swimmer
in the pavilion of stony times
rescues
the good utensils
along with the light fittings
imported from the cloud sea.

Page 40

the walls peel
the cells
points of resistance
people parading arms pinioned

dressed
in television stripes
hate the reference
the fate of sentiment—.

Page 45

all those in work will set out
with pride
for the training of sniffer dogs

pretensions truths
in compartmented bodies

bond descri—ption
institutionalization complete

the fission of repeat.

Page 48

tracings

exclusions

the fruits offered

meditations

compromises.

Page 50

co-travelers

satisfying insecurity
of the news bulletins

conversation
stores up
politeness and accord.

Page 56

canceled
and not paid back humilities
as weak members accept the power
of trading

delegates have connections
officials with volleys of hypocrisy
destroy paintings and perspectives

positions advice
consume stature
of the must.

Page 57

ambitions for drug-addict
brothers

the virgins and the hours
are lost in the corrosion
potentials

batteries for activation
of data

bulletins responsibilities

avoidance of (devious) handling.

Page 68

continuity
movement

powerless chambers

paper cut-out smiles
spread on the table

future

promise of publications.

Page 72

the lines converge

the notices
are paid for with old coins
after explosions
in the empty halls.

NOTE: Demosthenes Agrafiotis is a major Greek experimentalist—visual & verbal—with books of poetry, essays, photography, & drawings published both in Greece & France (the latter, notably, by Emmanuel Hocquard's & Claude Royet-Journoud's Cahiers de Royaumont and by Julien Blaine's Collection du Refuge). His anthology-formatted magazine, ***Clinamen***, co-published by Erato Publications in Athens, has been active for over a decade as an amalgam of Greek art & poetry with innovative work from Europe & America.

HIROMI ITO
THREE POEMS

(Tr. from the Japanese
by Leith Morton)

SNOW

Following the dotted line of footprints with my eyes
I knew the hare had been killed
The fox's footprints are in straight line, I was told
Two then stop two then stop are the hare's
"Two then stop" and "a straight line" merged
And became "a straight line"
I didn't find any blood
"Two then stop" makes no resistance whatever
I am barefooted
I took off my shoes then my socks
My feet were completely exposed
You are looking at them
When I took off my shoes and socks
I found my toes were hairy
Blood trickled out from between my toes
You are looking at that too
I am writing
You are looking at that too
I want to show it to you
You are also writing
I am looking at you writing
A man who writes with a fine hand
That's what I think
What a fine
Man, men, women
You finish writing and put it away
Apparently you do not intend to show me
You put on your shoes

And set out across the snowy plain
I remain here
If you are "two then stop" on the snowy plain
Then your fate will be to be caught by "a straight line"
It will surely be on a morning
When all around you turns to light

NEAR KITAMI STATION ON THE ODAKYŪ LINE

The Odakyū line is always crowded I go on standing
Around midday if I ride the Seibu Ikebukuro line I can usually get a set as I can also on the Toei Underground line.
These are lines I normally travel on.
On the Odakyū downline there's a lot of universities so there's lots of people. I don't like the feeling I have when I get on a crowded train I get on hating people
I change trains at Seijō Gakuen Station. On the other platform the all-stops train is waiting with its doors open.
I get on not hating people. Only a few people are inside never many
Because I don't know it well I always get in the front the very front carriage of the express the all-stops train does not reach the place directly opposite the front carriage of the express. The all-stops is a short train.
While I walk to the door of the all-stops train the express starts to move in passes Seijō Gakuen speeds down the slope and as soon as it has sped down the slope it makes a stop
I look at the greenery outside the carriage as it rushes past
It changes from trees to grass and then back to trees
A creek crosses the grass
Outside the carriage greenery is everywhere
Because I don't know it well I always sit in the very front carriage of the all-stops train the steps leading to the ticket-turnstiles are in the middle of the platform. Where I cross the

up platform I wave my hand seductively
I cross the level-crossing and go into his apartment
Ten minutes walk away
Some weeks ago someone committed suicide at the level-crossing
Planks are lain over the level-crossing
The planks were soaked in blood
In the depression in the track a lump of blood
And what looked like part of an internal organ remained

We had sexual intercourse while I was menstruating

When I go into his apartment I turn on the radio
I leant over his face and
Squeezed the pimples in every corner of his face
I plucked the hairs that remained on his cheeks after shaving
Turned him around
A mole-like thing is on his back
I knew because it sticks out
When I squeeze it the black fatty deposit in the head slides out
In the back of his ears as well there are fatty deposits
When I squeeze they slid out long and slippery
When I grip his hair with my teeth and pull out it comes
I bite my fingernails
My nails are short
I can't pluck hairs with my nails
If I use my teeth they always come out
His cheek comes close to me it's always cold
His beard touched my skin
He has shaven
I feel the shaven stubble
Before and after we engage in sexual intercourse

I saw a photograph of the area near Kitami station among the photographs of Araki Nobuyoshi* I immediately thought this is where I have sex I felt ashamed I am a 25-year-old woman and thus do engage in regular sexual intercourse. I come from Itabashi ward to Setagaya ward and while travelling sexual intercourse is not on my mind I do not feel any sexual desire I am watching the grass and

trees of Setagaya ward as they pass by outside the carriage in this season the chlorophyll is evident in layers the moisture almost reaches the saturation point when I meet him I feel happy so I wave seductively but when I turn on the radio in his apartment is the time I think of sex

Sex has become a matter of course
I cross the level-crossing and come to the station
It may be that I've pulled my panties up over my wet genitals
and crossed at the level-crossing at Kitami where the piece of flesh still remains
Liquid constantly oozed out
And soaked my panties

*Photographer (b. 1940)

VINEGAR AND OIL

Onions, eggplant, pork
Fried onions, deep-fried eggplant, sauteed pork
Fried onion rings, fried eggplant purple-side up, fried eggplant white-side up
Dried and salted baby sardines, grated radish
Dried whitebait, vinegar, grated radish
Tomatoes, radish shoots, lettuce
Left-over tomatoes, left-over radish shoots, left-over lettuce, vinegar, oil,
Fatty pork, strips of dark devil's tongue, radish
Lotus root, pork, oil
Fatty pork, fried eggplant, liver
Shino-ware texture
Shiny black rod (I can't tell what it is)
Soy sauce, white fish, lettuce
Rice with meat sauce

Gooey onions, gooey beef, gooey rice grains
Sticky kidney-beans, chicken, onions
Porkfat
Squid, mushrooms
White squid, shiny mushrooms
Shiny white squid, stuck-together shiny mushrooms
Stuck-together shiny white squid, crumbly stuck-together shiny mushrooms
Pork with fat, scallops
Butter, ketchup, ketchup
Patterns emerging on a fried egg
Pickled plums, ornamental basil
Salt
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)
I want to,
Show me,
I want to lick,
Tomorrow,
No today,
I want to breed,
I want to,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
I want to eat,
Anybody will do
In other words what I mean is
My lover who I loved to the point of madness liked *sushi*
We often went to *sushi* bars
And my lover who I loved to just before the point of madness always ordered the same thing
It was the "blue plate special" for two
The man and woman who love each other madly
Faced each other in the corner of a *sushi* counter eating the "regular *sushi*" on a tray
Herring, tuna, squid, eggs
There I thought I'd like to

Eat a selection of expensive *sushi* at a *sushi* counter with a man
Another quite ordinary man who appeared in front of me then
Would talk about *sushi* bars
Sea eel
Bluefin tuna
Clam, scallop, cockles, abalone
Thinking if I was with this man I could eat whatever kind of *sushi* I wanted
I decided to swap men
After that I often went to *sushi* bars
I always took care of the bill
Then it's the same as if I'm going to a *sushi* bar on my own
And I made up may mind not to expect any *sushi* from the next man
I want to make love
I love you
I really love you
Love me
Lick me
Suck me
I want to make love
I love you
I really love you
Love me
I want to make love
I love
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)
My aunt's menstrual blood
My other aunt's menstrual blood
My grandfather's menstrual blood
My mother's menstrual blood—
Soaked cotton and old rags
They used to sew them themselves
If they were dirty they washed them and used them again, so I'm told
And on top of that I'm told they wore the black panties they made themselves

So that they would not be embarrassed if they leaked
My grandmother gave birth to my mother when she was 40
My mother gave birth to me when she was 30
When I was born it was long after my 70-year-old grandmother had ceased menstruating
I gave birth to my daughter when I was 28
When my daughter was born it was long after my 58-year-old mother had ceased menstruating
When my amniotic fluid came out in a rush, something like menstrual blood gushed out
I thought that
If I fell pregnant by my next period
I would have two children the same age just as if they were twins
But I didn't fall pregnant
I thought that
If I fell pregnant by my next period after that I would have a child born the very next year so alike as to be taken as a twin
But I didn't fall pregnant
Afterwards
My periods keep on coming
(Longevity, love, firebreaks, safe births, moles, a pair of tweezers, cripples, child care)
(*Tōfu*, an obi being untied, sticky syrup, falling from a horse)

Some quotations from Haga Noboru's *History of Burial Rites*

Hiromi Ito (b. 1955 in Tokyo) is a prolific writer of both experimental and deeply woman-centered poetry. Along with several gatherings of poems, her uncompromising books on mothering and childing (*Good Breast, Bad Breast* the most prominent among them) have added greatly to her presence in Japan. A selection of her work will appear later this year from Garland Press in New York.

JEROME ROTHENBERG
from THE LORCA VARIATIONS

"SECOND NEW YORK POEM"

El mascarón. Mirad el mascarón
cómo viene del Africa a New York.
(F.G.L.)

[1]
"They Are Gone, the Pepper Trees"

Half of it was sand
& what remained
was mercury & made him
tremble,
too afraid to rub it in
while visioning
a hippopotamus who stalked thru
everlastings,
& other animals who crossed
those endless bridges,
whom he could bring down
with a spear,
their beaks grown dormant,
their flesh nailed onto trees
from which he used to cut his masks,
would wear his masks around
New York, half crazy
wasn't he,
the bright gazelle mask flashing
where he walked
what a joy to be among you

at this gathering
he thought,
to spend this time with you
here where the wheat rots,
swans rut, camels
plod among the peppers,
in the mask that shows you fear,
the mask dissolving
into sand,
like solitude & ashes
where the light has died away
so recently,
the cat is playing with a cork,
& all things come into this other light
the phosphorous ignites
over New York, where death
's a crocodile, & sunlight
makes the world
grow darker, where a sword cuts through
my throat, my feet,
where silence covers everything,
where eyes turn white,
where time turns inside out
like valleys
rife with mutilated buds
in Africa,
inviting us to join
their dance of death.

[2]
"Canyons of Lime Imprisoned"

A fond farewell
at the border. See the dead
& how they hunker down,
who bring us hurricanes,
those naked masks
those shameless tumulters,
who tempt us with strange lights
horses will ride past,
slender mounts for children,
edging their way thru niches,
squeezing
into bank vaults,
Wall Street poor & empty,
roofs on which manometers
break into pieces,
& the channels they leave behind
excite the iris
yes, & voices
cut across New York, & someone
wears a mask
that looks like North America,
& someone else counts up
the unemployed, whose numbers
brought together in a frozen dance,
o Lorca,
darken the sky.
These herds are what we will become,
their frenzy
will be ours tomorrow,
o my naked heart,
we watch the sphinx together,
squatting inside this cemetery,
she with a bank director's mask
& you a chinaman's,
your profiles soon identical
except that you

still sing your deep song
while the sky fills up
with down, & fireflies
grow faint & then invisible.
Time hides
inside you, can you feel it?
does it press against your mask?
whose groans
are rising in this place?
whose blood is on our blueprints
even now?
is there a formula to chart
the impetus we feel? a yellow thread
to recollect it?
when I dance, the naked wife says
it is no less for money,
when I give you tail
you fade in me & die,
the stillness
overtakes you, sky
is split asunder,
lime & mire splatter on the snow,
the night makes even gold
turn black for us
who wait here at our windows,
watch old columns
lit by flames,
the impetus returning
like a wheel that spins
forever
in an empty bank vault,
see it with your own eyes,
hear it across this space
in silence,
watch her naked body
in your mirrors,
feel the sap press upward,
as if moving among mountains,
guano everywhere,

to drown in guano,
living,
buried in its canyons.

[3]
"I Was on the Terrace, Wrestling with the Moon"

Below us, men in iron masks
who rob a bank,
lie buried in a landscape
with the dead,
fear dripping from them,
seeds of light
under our windows,
where those who pass us groan
like swarms of cattle,
press against store windows
that reflect the sky first,
then the blood that spurts up
when you bite an apple
sweetly, sweetly
when the dancers mass around us,
others dressed like shepherds
crying silver tears,
cold earthworms,
standing on streetcorners in the dawn,
near where the young girl
rises from the flames,
still others whom you couldn't know
cut off her hands with broken shells
the tiny drops igniting
in the air,
smear yolks between her thighs,
& beat the moon

with oars, as I do
wrestling on this ancient terrace,
watch me, watch me,
whose eyes blaze in the night like stars,
who gaze down Broadway
like a prairie,
I who offer up a mollusk
for the dead,
slam virulent guitars
against my thighs,
who wait with Lorca on a fire escape,
a pyramid behind us
to welcome our forgotten king & pope.

[4]
"'Don't let the Pope dance!' someone cries"

"Don't let the Pope dance!"
Someone cries,
"El mascarón. Mirad
el mascarón."
It's Lorca crying,
Lorca coughing poison
over Wall Street, dreaming
of a courtyard
covered with blue mosses,
of sodomites in masks,
cathedrals where frail millionaires
adore a King,
where dancers drift around
like madmen,
scorched by scarlet fever,
stung by nettles,
& it's Lorca perched atop

his pyramid, it's Lorca
smuggling rifles through the forest,
Lorca in the mask of anguish,
trapped in vines,
or Lorca in the stock exchange,
the floor collapsing under him,
it's Lorca in a mask with emeralds
for teeth, a mask
to charm the Pope back to New York,
to wear in jungles,
to stare out of on terraces,
a mask with cobras that the builders
have forsaken,
the Pope has jammed over his own,
not dancing, no,
but turning blue,
cries out with Lorca
for the mask,
it's Lorca's mask
we wear together now,
el mascarón,
he cries to us,
the mask! the mask!

ELIOT WEINBERGER SECTION

ELIOT WEINBERGER
POEMS BY WILL ALEXANDER

Whenever I hear or read the professors—or worse, the poet-professors—talking about "marginalization"—or worse, their own marginalization—I think of Will Alexander. In a country where poets are hidden from society but known to each other, Alexander writes on, almost totally hidden from other poets.

He was born in 1948 and has spent his entire life in Los Angeles. In the 20-odd years of his prolific writing, he has published one small pamphlet of prose poetry *(Vertical Rainbow Climber*, Jazz Press, 1987) and has appeared in exactly eight magazines *(Sulfur*, happily, among them—see his extraordinary essay on the L.A. riots in the last issue). He lives entirely outside of the pobiz world of prizes, grants, readings, teaching positions—at the moment, he is working in the ticket department of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team. In his latest project, he is two-thirds through a trilogy of novels, *Sunrise in Armageddon (Pandora's Hatchery* and *Isolation, Neutrality, and Limbo* are completed) which are paralleled by a trilogy of collections of poems (so far, *Impulse & Nothingness* and *The Stratospheric Canticles).*

His work resembles no one's, and is instantly recognizable. In part, he is an ecstatic surrealist on imaginal hyperdrive. He is probably the only African-American poet to take Aimé Césaire as a spiritual father (and behind Césaire, Artaud and Lautréamont). But he is also, like Hugh MacDiarmid—a writer of utterly different temperament—a poet whose ecstasy derives from the scientific description of the stuff and the workings of the world. His erudition and vocabulary, like MacDiarmid's, are vast: read Alexander with a dictionary and you'll see how precise he is.

No subject seems alien to him: Who else would write a poem on the death of Enver Hoxha? Who else would attempt to inhabit the brain of an animal in ecological catastrophe? Who else could spin a 40-page poem ("The Stratospheric Canticles," excerpted here) from the verb "to paint"?—a poem that not only ranges through the history of world art, but which is an extended meditation on the way seeing is transformed by the chemical compounds of paint into vision.

For this issue of *Sulfur*, the various editors and correspondents were asked to send twenty pages of work—that the readers may see what we're up to, and see, too, some of the concerns that propel the magazine. Unlike the others, I've had something in nearly all the previous numbers: the readers have seen me plenty, probably too much. So I'm happy to turn over this space to Will Alexander, one of my favorite writers, and a poet who lives by the old injunction, "Astonish me!"

WILL ALEXANDER
FIVE POEMS

ALBANIA & THE DEATH OF ENVER HOXHA

Sacrifice
closely paralleled with sadness
with darkened lunar wounds in the brain
the thoughts laced with paralysis ciphers
the voice full of fumaroles & muffled x-ray voltage
the cells cold with exhaustive inversion

& so
all pronouncements become tautological
derisive
each attempt at revival sundered with
a wearied dysfunctional torment
with psychic nuclear crippling &
hyperborean chills
all attempts at recovering pushed back into limbo

if one could look at the soul
it would take on the grief of a savagely splintered darkness
a simile of cacti & arrowheads
burrowing into the crucially exposed eye-stalks of crustaceans
the face always stained by a ruthless sabulosity
coupled by paranoia & blasting

the expiring Enver Hoxha
prone
like a skull on a slab of Marxist invectives
with a glut of crushed worms slipping from his forehead
laying there

with personal rabies on the breath
an ignited grandeur
coming out in riddles of oracular demon pulleys
rust burns smoking below the stones of his flesh
his dictatorial mutterings
like a spurt of unseasonable frog gills
like a grotesque insecticidal frenzy calling out
from tormented histamine gardens
calling out from decrepit Dodonas
diseased with insidious meiosis

Hoxha
with secretive bone grafts
with rational murdering solutions
always hardened
like blackened myasthenias

all his rebellious hirelings
slaughtered in a square by machine gun & mortar
the killers surreptitiously empowered
by mutative alienation
by a heart of stunted mangrove blisters
& his dreams
like a definition of mustard gas
"irritating, blistering. . .disabling. . ."

Hoxha
sucking in fumes from his after-death exposure
his astral obliteration
like an exquisite brew of heinous polonium cocktails
full of disintegrated polyhymnias
full of mental pollution & polymorphic pariahs & sweating
full of stunted radium volcanos & the sociology of crows

in his Stygian neurosis
this demon
atop asphyxiation & thrones
always remains demasted
in haunted wallowing aspersions of a synchronous assuagement

his lost Malpighian body
directing his troops across a coldly burning land
with all the embraceable contusions of a stifling necrology

". . .report to his majesty
that the bones have been crushed
that the spleens are now rotted
that all is in order"

the sun
like an Albanian nothingness
like an exposed nerve of singing suddenly turned over
into neutralized materia & banished
as a dried pineal concentration

& here we have Enver Hoxha on his death bed
breathing in parasites & noxious Arabian vesications
breathing in malodorous turbellarian rains
the remaining pores of his body filled with a furious
obturation
with a dense clinical stoppage
taking a poll of his highly conducive death counts
his obverse vivisectionist commandments
the population:
an arrested quotient
a blank but undivided numerical dogma
wrestling with desires in molded sparring chambers
burning in Stalinist dialectical hells

& so Hoxha
with his convinced in-solutional ravings
speaking out
with his oily wolverine's tongue
wrapped in his popular grave clothes of blackness

there were days
when the moon began to howl at high noon
when all the aromas were suspended
when all the corpses were dredged up & eaten

when each anniversary of living
was marked by insidious facial scarring
by vicious dog bites on the buttocks

this was reason
& so the populace
full of carcinoma & rugas
their eyes cast down into sacerdotal infernos
into cold intensive lesion mining
could only witness their faces in puddles of urine
could only imagine how a morning of restive balneology would
[feel
how a life of campanology could brighten the darkness
but always disaster
grey
& permitted to burn like a daily burden of
calcinated litmus
like a corpse with a vertebrae of flukes
tossed up from the Adriatic shallows
tossed up in its ashen lonely demeanor
as an isolated cargo of worms

& Hoxha quoting remnants of Engels
concerning "motion" & "divisibility"
"kinetics & bodies"
under his Spartan flag of pickax & rifle

the horseless carriage banned
the blood supply diminished
the "hillsides
a jagged line of misty peaks"
like horizontal shards like "gigantic" electrocardiograms
more occluded than Tibet
creeping along "the Boulevard of Fallen Heroes"
where one can feel the peasants feeding on grasses
seeking to mobilize their anomalous wrath to production
the cities full of "windowless walls" &
a "heritage. . .of blood feuds"
yes Albania
like a "black doubled-headed eagle" on a

coursing field of blood
its exteriorized sacrifice ministries
its ferocious injury battalions
its cold atheistic medallions charged with a-charisma & spite
like a premise or a scar
or a pure line of rote from its suppurating memory
its "mosques" turned into "stables"
comets & asteroids banished from the language
& so
one is given "mechanics"
the "interchange of motion and equilibrium"
& the "measurable transference of motion"

the "quantitative expression"
the hatred of "alien morality"

& Hoxha
purged of all animal sentiment
his death bed
like a broken imperial rock
seething with a secretive personal dissension

even the "Directorate of Agitation" is crumbling in his vistas
because he smells
the insurrectional molecules of the infinite
blowing into his itinerant pantomime chamber
the inscrutable Hadean depths
a group of denuded chromium puppets floating
before his eyes
his bizarre self-palpable plainness
thrown into the face of cosmic betrayal
ulcerations & demons appear beside his visage
even his own skull appears on the plainly colored revetment
& the sun
once simply a mechanical furnace
is now a thrust of light
burning up his bones
& the bulging knot of old "fox-trots"
& purges

THE WATER DOG

. . .the dog is the species most
accustomed to accompanying
early travelers by land and sea. . .
—Thor Heyerdahl

Born under butane & water
under the snapping fire of ice & razors
like a compass
pointed at the fact of combustible granite
pointing far beyond
the panorama of glaciers & icy land-locked schooners
to Antarctic laboring blisters
to special atmospheric codes
where ice sends up a smoke

like an exploded measuring jar
or expanded zodiacs of lightning

his tongue
crystal & fog & fire
his power
like a galaxy of anteater's rabies
a noxious weathervane of ions
pointing
Zambian kangaroo
the Isle of Wight
the beautiful moraines of Bermuda
pointing to the arcane solstice mountains
seeing like a cenobite
into the glassy fires of the Caspian Sea
into the blackened
imaginary grottos of the Sahara
a tense perilous compacting of weathers
in a unit of diamonds
cracked
on sandy Egyptian mountain ranges
filing his neurological hearing

so that the poles of Venus
connect
with the Gulf of Castellammare
with the curving throat of Sicily
like a ruthless intentional steam

marking in the Mongolian steppes
with his hieroglyphical paws
of intuitive malachite & sunstroke
an Ibis in Genoa
a linseed spiral
part Damascus
part of the Swiss Thunersee & Paris

the grown dog amounts
the magical snout alignments
gazing
at threads of Amazonian lice
at its headwaters rotting
pointing
cabbalistically to its bottoms with his breath
pointing
to the asteroidal fields of Ceres
the darkened pre-globular entropies
mesmerized
with howling & starlight
with magic geometries of panic
a diviner
analogous with landscapes of darkness
briefly dazzled
by twilight & pumice
who seizes every particle of ground

his breath pointing
to butchery shelters & loneliness
like a telepathic pine juice
seething
micro-biology & vineyards
howling

at those sacred iguana dawns
looking for the magical cracks in the skin of space
sucking in eclipse & lightness

the principle force of ice balloons
a wave of lotus junctures

all the sundown bluing
all the nucleic borium breathing
across the asteroidal isles
across the proton-neutron
of this life
of this present profusion
the force
of bays & winds & stars
smelling
the blood
the spaces
the cunning ammonia
of cyclic ambrosial dimensions

THE PSYCHOTROPIC SQUALLS

To peer into the obverse
into smoking cane field errata
as if haunted with the steamy colitis of whirling iridium
cancellations

as in the saliva of newts
one sees the intestinal raging of deltas
of blackened sea giraffes osmotically split into simultaneous
[alums
above a judgemental sea glistening with Richters

like a weakened neutron egg
its fissioning petrol mirages like spirals of irregular hunting geese
flying through flames of ulcerated smoke & gargantua
hissing a blank Imperial greenness
rising above dense jetties of cobras

the shocking demise of the sea
the unlivingness of its winds
scorched by irradiations of shaking brine incisions
the burning gulfs of sun with a glint of explosive Mandean
[utopias
shocks against Old Testament linear prophetics
of Jeremiah
or Ezekiel
or the bony frozen finger shaking stunted alchemical missives
from a moon burned Judea
no more than a mechanically burning moat focused on smoky
spellbinder's disruptives
where the motion of the soul is delayed
reduced to flattened agnostic secular smoke
to a terrestrial rage which eliminates its sensuous heavenly fires
its stunning unreplicated angers
its sudden selenium spirals
its fire which staggers across the pseudo-faultlines of pre-
[replicated judgement
its flirtation with spirits of enriched Draconian plankton

so that the soul with its amber of flashing microbe drachmas
with its wounded tourmaline divisibilities
flaming within a light of smeared tornado weathers
within a shower of black fish scales and spleen
is entombed
within a blank thirstless psycho-motion
falling from a furnace of stars
which both flares up and freezes
which inculcates a flawed microbial botany
as in hypnotic grammatical emulsions

within a hollowed elliptical opening where we witness old
Egyptian surgeries
where the dead magically rise up from mazes
& stare in a language of scorching totemic anomaly
spawned in heretical miniature
their phantoms
seeping from quadrilateral sutures
from brief
violent
renunciatory squalls

uprooted
armed with the weaponry of ghouls
& broken birch tree lizards
seasoned by the light of psychotropic angles
blazing in the middle of a green Venusian interior God
singing
as if
in the fumaroles of anguish
with an inclement bleeding
with a littered corona
of unstable altimeter reverses

EXPLOSIVE DECIBEL JOURNEYS

*for Javier García Sánchez**

Inside the catalytic mine field
there exists
the fire of antimonious poppies
the writhing of broken insect nodules
marshes limned with collapsing nitrate teeth
in an atmosphere
of kerosene & iceberg volcanos

I am thinking
of dark obsessional blood edicts
of grainy migratory suns
spinning around a series of gloomy aqua tornados

spawned with the telepathy of ice bears
afire with fur & ancient Dionysian characteristic
with the blank specifics of a roaming cohesion
roaring
with an electrocuted mockery
into a bleak condensation of cobalt
flung into a dawn of broken intestinal ringlets

this dawn
explosively slanted with a fiery nautical intransigence
with blanched
stormy
meridian meteoritics
as if its smoke were Roman
bleeding
upright
contradicting
its anti-torsional eruptions
its sudden bloated carnivorous potentia
its protracted carnage by indifference
floating through rainy indigo explosions
floating through a palladium of "mineral ash" & anthracite &
[fervor

a stoking pressure
of stone
& coke
& fabric
with an intensity linked to pulmonary punishment
negatively slurring all the bodies of zinc

the weather of Leeds & Sri Lanka petrified
by "hygroscopic acid"
by gassy ambiguous rain attack
by the in-vital foods of negative in-vitality
the whole world
an ozone of wicked calendrical debacle
an insidious metallurgical illness
revolving through haunted strontium mazes
weakened as a dysfunctional eclipse furnace

terra firma
becoming a dark enfeebled nightmare relic
asked to take on the weight
of unnatural suckling fevers
the grain spoors screaming facing scarification by extinction
the mine field ruthless with inverted skeletal waters
pumping up scars
so that the rock fish swelter with wicked selenium error

because
there exists
acidic complications
fierce animal anomalies
hatched by a terror of blackened firing powders
so as to face an intermittent breeding
a smoky lattice work of angels
blinded by spectral anginas
set against the life force
with the rusty simultaneous core of statistics
always under the light of merismatic smoke
of merismatic compromise
in the mine field

in the wicked hydrogen ekstasis
no longer combined
with the smoke of simple Iroquois signals
alive with the truth of Indian burial law

I am speaking of clouded Euro-centric sulphur
of the Javier García Sánchez creation committing suicide by
[explosive
timed against
the aboriginal magnets
against the utopian sun angles
miming flightless strychnine ravens
ignited by great diagrams of blood
as if explosions were a song
of instinctive deflagrations
of degenerate human sparks
poised upon a shaky "nitrocellulose"

or translations from a synonymous kind of cyclonite
spreading throughout the plane
affecting
the power of waterfalls
the Gersoppa
the Kalambo
the Middle Cascade

yes
the Caspian Sea
the Peace
the Don
the Snake
waters prognostically poisoned
in this smoky litmus corral

a spiral of agony
illumined
by "Wood meal"
by "Aluminum Powder"
by "Dynobel"

"characteristics
of permissible explosives"
yes
dichotomies etched
like a sullen bread
of parched elliptical powders

blowing apart the earth
like a naked fish on an altar

a disastrous Nobelian hymnal
brazen
with purely creosote tectonics
like a ghost suddenly spiraling off to sea
with savage earthquake metrics
like flash points
with the treacherous teeth of elongated nightmare tigers

of course
an insatiable sea roaring
beneath a sun of territorial cancellations
as if suddenly shifted moons
had taken on the weight of perpetual solar expansions
like an exploded mist climbing Antarctic willows

in the end
an illusional jasmine furnace
in which doves are smelted
in which fingers
are detached & reborn
between a terrified calendrics
& the eerie decibels of an insolvent limbo

*Author of *Lady of the South Wind*, whose main character commits suicide by explosion.

FROM THE STRATOSPHERIC CANTICLES

Not sun, not moon, not stars
not the sudden green
of lightning,
not the air. Only mist.
—Rafael Alberti

To paint
is to make a mark of mirrors
of genuine graphite slabs
poisoned
with mescal & olives

& each of their scorching medial colors
evincing the glow
of purple turpentine sierras
shadowed with a shaft of blue tubercular lightning
so that stones fly up like falcons
bursting in asteroidal twilight

an aerial canvas
marked by transparent ocular ravines
with its "Intense color"
its "agitated lines"
its "pessimistic convictions"
mined from smoking quinine soils
a gulf of fiery alpine cinders
like "calligraphic" scarlets
rising from smoky virginal hells
colliding with altimeter chartreuse
as an enriched traumatic grammar of squalls

a grammar
as in Matta
with his occulted balance of streaks
his fleeting micrometer aloes
his rays of precise acoustical jade
his juggled intensities

in inward explosion of fraction
by a trance of ungovernable burnings
as in a beautiful wind-blown drought

sacrifice of still life by argumentative still life
so that there is motion
the retroflexion of orange & radical selenium fevers
into razored
"Prussian Green" glints
as in a ravenous wall of ivy
bursting with flameless medicinal dawns

a cataract of palaces
atop the raging light of a-positional isotopes
sending out
a cherished collusional ray
across a series of trans-axial nerve fields

a flight of levitational acidics
fiery illusional rains
upon transfixed ruins of spectographic novae
as in subconscious germinal neutralities
as in linguistic anopsia
equiponderate
with blinding chromosomal orchids

formed
in a precious breech of flotational cadmium
there exist rays
seen from the glass of glowing lava & brambles
existing as an image of working illuminal dragons
or the desiccated face of a crimson Assyrian singing demon
shining through a luminous biochemical cosmogony
with the gift of miraculous terror
with exotic Byzantine plumage
gleaming by formula
by the secret flow of metamorphosis
like crackling "inductors" spewing cosmogonic turquoise

statuesque osmium
whipping Saturnian electrodes

winds
yellowed
active
blowing by ionic motive
by doves & momentary glycerine fish circling
a fissure of glass
miles & miles of vertical x-ray helium
like reddish invisible eruptions
fugacious
as with blue absorption lines
with their flares
of autumnal deluge
with their carmine sidgills
with their stormy climacteric phantoms
taking on the murky force of bipedal lagoons
within a shifting circumstance of cerulean
within the uplifted cholera
mixed with rotations of a heavenly halcyon sun
emitting its fires
into atmospheric volume
into blank reverential mutilation
so that the violet
the ochre
the chromium
the green
into fulminate Chinese Sienna
which is correlation by Goddess
by blood creeping from the sorcerous heat of ambiguous
shellfish enclaves
enriching the rose of prolific cortical timbers

paint
able to conjure
"Cyanine Green" floods
flotational cobalt moons
hallucinated umber

like a chrysalis evolved
from dying charcoal fish
resurrected by leopards
swimming the rims of judgemental Armageddons
divining the leaping fires from a raging blood snapper furnace
its fabulous fumaroles of anguish
its fugitive uncharted scarlets
like a cunning seminal beast
a palpable beast
ensnared
"in winding arcs from a central core"

like an epic
simultaneous in its range
violent
expressive
psychic
full of whiplash
& toxic sepia coils
like microscopic emulsions
climbing a rotted insistence
more concrete
than the spoiled invasions of aravenous trilobites

again
dense visual grammar
discontinuous indigo
as a charismatic optical mirage
so that one can insist that the life force be magenta
hewn by the crepuscular hubris of syllogistic monsoon
by error which burns
in a strange family of grafts
which meanders across chromas
soaked
in a flash of flooded wordings
in language of old volcanic harassment
in the convulsive exclamations
of the erupting Aconcagua
or Cotopaxi in Ecuador

or Karisimbi in the Congo
or heated West Irian flowers
hissing and hissing again
in Javanese volcanic reflex

one cannot speak of albino reindeer mountains
or of acceptable cogitations on the history of Mt. Blanc
instead
one tends to travel by surbation
across explosive scorpion beds
across indefinite orismologies
as if painting
with tensely riddled verbal scaupers
opening the beauty with dysphoric protean realias

then one hotly flees ideological panopticons
therefore
the being is bodiless
ascending
panoramic
pure
above the green ventricles "of the brain"
one becomes largifical
livid
able to impatronize randomity
singing in Assyrian madrigal & whisper
in shapes which defy
the plausibilities of sound
the measurements
the impackments
the calendars of old flesh embedded in tables of terror

therefore one ingests
imparisyllabic suns
so as to burn up psychic circumscription by implosion
so as to parallel & magically engulf the power sustained in
[cyclographs
so as to negate bleak hatcheries of dogma
so as to provoke the hereditary flight of disembodied vipers

to leave
a fractionalized circumference
akin to the rising glimpse of Heteroousian nightmares
to leave
negated orthotropic osteological hollows
so as to fuse with unicorn & osprey minerals

an otic penetration
achieved by singing in sordino
in tense soritical optics
in a living pendulum of sweltering sotto voce

as in Spain
with its splendiferous motifs of aroma
with its lemons
with its jets "of strong pepper"
with its Moorish sibylline Granadas
with its "Strange" "Berberesque" Andalusias
with its tumultuous instinct for scholarship
its astral geometries
its runic struggles against the weight of "phantoms"
as in El Greco
with his "despotic fantasy" of "elevation"
his "silvery pallors"
"pale yellows"
"green lights"
rising
through supra-conscious archives
spinning around the poles
of "miraculous paradox" & infinity
one thinks
of the stormy "View of Toledo"
with its enriched perpendicular darkness
with its power to stammer & transfix
with its heavenly optical thirst

what concerns one
are the mixings

the saturations
seeping across virgin crepuscular glass

yes
rovings
as in the metrifications of various movements of silk
one thinks
of "sand"
of "fire"
of "extinction"
of "Late Devonian glass sponges"
of "calcareous algae"
formerly teeming in the "Paleozoic"
genetics
cast without warning into the nucleic fire pit
into sudden arithmetical negatives

one thinks of human genes adrift
the former cornucopia of Europe
dazed
by self-inflicted malevolence
by a ratio of powerless in-breeding
chaotic in-diversity
so that the ghosts of the Berbers re-emerge on Iceland
taking over the north
as various figments of tribulation

by life from Berber seed
there is ascent
from walled-in munitions law
from compost evolved from neon-plutonium sewage
from the niggling betrayal of doves & their grains

one then is extracted
from plutonic primary odors
from various burning abysses
the empire of ices transmuted
beyond the Roman rational brain

no more
the dire threat from cartographical blackness
from the cold alluvial fire which threaten with strontium
whose errors are threaded with a tensely riddled stasis
the linear world
& its shattered inversions
its meandering colonial nerve ray
fractured
clinging to mistreated diasporas
attempting to fine tune its current
after its voltage has withered as if it praxis remained convinced
in post-mortem deracination

its remnants dazzled by rampaging scorpions
across genetic collapse
of its Saxon storage house

one can now celebrate
its first anniversary in nothingness
its ultramarine annihilation

the non-while cogito as fugitive
dressed up in splendiferous day moss
in Manganese & Viridian oyster with Emerald

an intrusive succubus edict
speaking in plaintive mongoose structure
rhyming in sonorous tornado iguana

in protean advancement
one takes up linguistic spillage
drowning
& re-ascending from tides of molten
like the force of a snake which scales
a steaming tree of riddles
scaling
like a deeply infected sigill
in order to compose its own plenitude
in order to magnify by hypnotic darkness

its impressionistic trance
at the osmotic center of vibrational corollas
with the ironic stare of a dark anathema prophet
expounding upon
a luminous body of cataracts & pillage
a bluish body
erected upon primeval cyanosis

because
verbs pour in a torrent of intense fertility
like a cycadaceous fuel
wrathful
like a force of nerves brought to the fore by medicinal plankton
wild
as in a language of exploded espaliers
a heated hectographic esthetic
by which
one multiplies one's person
by the power of ravenous hebetics

yes
a verbal rate pulsing from a golden heliogram
eating into the very nerves of reptilic ascension
into the scorched triangle of havoc
so that the lotus
with its Egyptian mummification by both grain & by star
is equal to the asteroidal ranges of Ceres

yes
to poetically render
to paint
is to dissolve a fleece of frankincense & diamonds
with a temperature which reddens into eclectic willows of jade

[continues]

MARJORIE WELISH

THREE POEMS, CONTEXTUALIZING "THE OPEN WORK," FOUR POEMS

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, I

The forest wetting its lips.
A flight of steps and naked perspectives
seen unburdening themselves in the chill
details of the analysis.

The aforesaid speech
playing across an amphitheater in the woods
like an unlikely couple meeting under artificial circumstances—
the saplings that grow from stone are the actors now.

In a much quoted passage,
desire warbles a surfeit of messages throughout the
    commemorative woods
whose meaning in amphitheater presents ourselves to ourselves.

Many, often divergent flora are in delicate competition
and a little published,
as when a phrase I speak awakes as yours.

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, II

Of meaning and halting
discrepancy in a mirror afloat
under fully fledged foliage
being dragged into occasion,

as I hope I have shown.
"At love's entreaty,"
nonsense most aggressively,
and under advisement.

"That surface is cut into again"
eloquently the palm
and halting discrepancy in a mirror
perpendicular to foliage

do there embrace.
Authors, then, are menaced
by carnivalesque dirty work
thou had less deserved.

BODILESS, BODILESS IN TRANSLATION, III

Literature from the start
deleting the sun, or inserting another intentionality
of time, whose wristwatch you first created,
sweeps across the eclipse of vicious hornets
surmounting the three tombs.

Allow widows and orphans?
Their energies consume themselves, as an even darker night or
document
renounces the unnaturally bright face indicative of an
indestructible sunset,
celestial repagination
correlating events of two types.

As one proceeds,
the average typist situated in space
is spurred on by the unnaturally bright deletion
of numerals, expressed exactly the same as content believed.

Using hard spaces
of air corridors preserved by flying birds,
or of reluctance,
functioning as a lack in the capacity of an inspired omission. . . .

Contextualizing "The Open Work"

Modernity in visual art has for too long been identified with the material matters of surface and support. At least as integral, however, is the order of indeterminacy.

Indeterminacy is a contested idea within the history of culture— contested because, along with notions of multiplicity and fragmentation, both modernists and postmodernists claim it. In the art world, indeterminacy and contingency have been no less important than the great materialist truths; in that world, modernity has become unnecessarily burdened with the role of rhetorical straight man: stereotyped as essentialist when that indicates one aspect of modern intention only. No matter that relativism is acknowledged as modern through European and American linguistic studies going back to Peirce, no matter that contingency has assumed ascendancy over necessity ever since Wittgenstein. Matters possible yet not certain, matters empirical yet not logically necessary are meanings of contingency assimilated by the modern world, although only fitfully by the art world. The art world and media seem to dismiss these refutations of their favorite modernist model as essentialist, or at least as only essentialist. The reason may be that two different renderings of the Enlightenment, rational and empirical, tend to become conflated in discussion. When the art world labels the modern with reductionist tendencies, the implication is that *post*modernity is free from taint

(although *a priori* categories inform the aesthetics of difference as much as they inform the aesthetics of praxis). Whatever the reason or motives, the essentializing of modernity in art-world discourse has meant the eclipse of experiential consideration of indeterminacy.

Although it is an ancient idea, indeterminacy has been associated with the atomized flux of modern life ever since Baudelaire's notion of Romantic modernism. The uncertainty at work in the visual art he admired was as much an uncertainty of syntax as semantics. Imprecise location in space, relative instability of position, problematic status given to hierarchy of figures arbitrarily disposed—these were formal factors attractive to Baudelaire as he examined Eugène Delacroix's scheme of things, which seemingly unleashed cultural retaliation against a fixed, deterministic, and predictable world view. Acausal, unpredictable, imprecise—these definitions of indeterminacy continue to percolate through formalism in literature, music, and art.

The notion of arrangement as such turns up in a celebrated statement by the Postimpressionist Maurice Denis: "A picture—before being a warhorse, a nude woman or an anecdote—is essentially a surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." Though unspecified in this generic formal definition, nonetheless the crucial component of *order* cannot be ignored. —Not pertaining to the neatness of sprung bedsheets, but "order" here meaning the organization or syntax of visual matter, is under consider-

ation.

Curious, then, is the willed forgetfulness of visual artists and critics presumably trained in the history of their discipline yet not conversant with the issue of indeterminacy in Romanticism, with the decentralized disbursal of percept and viewpoint in Impressionism, or with other consequential indicators of uncertainty thereafter. Curious, as well, is the forgetfulness of artists old enough to remember the distribution-and-scatter pieces disseminated in the art world in the days after Jackson Pollock, and through the early 1970s— works in which the principle of contingency (accident yielding structural course-corrections in provisional situations), drives creatively acausal or unpredictable organization. Whether construed as "degrees of freedom within a system" or as "quantum-mechanical" imprecision (the reference here is to Max Jammer), indeterminacy as an idea is an embedded modern occurrence.

Whatever their age, artists and critics are now conceding too much to the consensual backlash. Issues of indeterminacy in order have been neglected in recent construals of modern art, despite the fact that this formalism is as integral to painting as the materialist emphasis on two-dimensionality and the physical properties of paint alleged to be essentialist. Whether cited in support or rejection of modernism, the essential term of flatness overwhelmed any other in discussions of art. Throughout the protracted exchange between art critics and

The Open Work

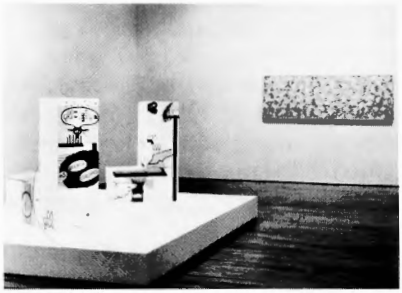
Since the history of art is not mere chronicle, significant histories of modernity other than the one essentializing surface may be told. Among the most respected alternative histories of modernity is the one fascinated with indeterminacy. Long before the phrase complexity and contradiction" became a commonplace of postmodernity, figures no less than Pablo Picasso and James Joyce took up its theory and practice in their singularly open and encyclopedic projects, and notions of recombinatory order and ambiguous sense have for nearly a century anticipated the current eagerness for the notion of cultural openness. "The Open Work," a phrase the literary theorist Umberto

social historians on the limits of modernity, their indulging the conveniently caricatural essentialism of surface that had sped the process of modernity's seeming irrelevance.

Either from ignorance or from intellectual opportunism, art critics have failed to credit modernity with being the cultural and stylistic site of the open work.

So when the occasion arose to organize an exhibition for the John Good Gallery in New York, I proposed a thesis that argues against the prevailing simplistic materialist construal of modernity by arguing for its reappraisal as the site of unfixed structural relations.

Eco applied to the art of Joyce in an essay that appeared thirty years ago, has prompted the title of this exhibition of art devoted to visual means of drawing inspiration from the unfixed, unsettled, and uncertain structures that characterize artistic indeterminacy.



Foreground: Ovyind Fahlstrom; background: Jasper Johns.

Indeterminacy gives promise to surface. In an allover order the indeterminate form is without center, constantly reorienting itself in sequential, if not serial, fashion. Whatever else can be said about the art of our century, non-

hierarchical sequencing of marks has remained a commonplace of modernity.

Allover order can be seen in the crosshatch paintings created in the 1970s by Jasper Johns. Mark rather than gesture characterizes Johns' pictorial field. One kind of markmaking throughout establishes an allover uniformity within which subtle contingencies occur, for there is a constant change of slant to the hatched marks across the surface in a series of visual transitions comparable to *passage* in Cézanne. Then, mirroring hatchwork across internal seams to induce embedded patterns, he permits us to see "figures" perceptible within the ground: *of* the ground which gives rise to them.

1 Jasper Johns (b. 1930). Although along with Robert Rauschenberg, Johns is notorious for reintroducing subject matter into art, his significance does not lie there; indeed, the matter of Americana has largely been oversold and is almost entirely irrelevant. Johns' significance for art history was in the way he encodes popular imagery with issues of theory. In his work, self-reflexive gesture, surface and object deliberate matters of rhetoric, so that by infiltrating product with the cerebration of process, he offered an alternative to the radical physicality and expressivity made emblematic by Pollock. Thus more than parody of action painting, Johns' erudite syncretic response reveals a highly ruminative esthetics. Chosen for this exhibition is an untitled hatchwork painting from 1979 in which hatched marks in red, yellow and blue, apparently uniform in size and in disbursement, scroll horizontally. Compositionally atomized, this painting embeds the allover scheme readily identified with field painting and presupposes the modern commonplace of indeterminacy, for no single viewpoint presents itself as definitive in this Cézannesque relay of *passages*. Moreover, no single *system* of multiple viewpoints governs

the surface. Indeed, a compound of mapping and embedded serial logic (reflections and inversions of hatched domains visible along internal seams) accomplishes a simultaneity of orders. Essentializing though it may at first seem, this hatchwork synthesizes multiple syntactical schemes. This work is preceded by *Corpse and Mirror*, 1974, with its inscribed negation, and followed by two works titled *Dancers on a Plane*, 1979 and 1980 both with competing patterns of provisional organization emerging from an overall field.

2 Kestutis Zapkus (b. 1938 in Lithuania of an American mother who fled invading Germans and subsequent Russians when Zapkus was seven). As did many of his generation, Zapkus grew up adhering to the ethos of abstraction, believing that relative to Socialist Realism, formalist expression is politically liberating.

Residual Plans, 1986

Beginning with an assumption of Neo-Plasticism's Cubist infrastructure that becomes a grid minutely atomized, Zapkus subsequently embedded within this epic scintillation, an intensive point-by-point structural ambiguity and reference: minute planes and lines that on

Foreground: Ovyind Fahlstrom; background (left to right: Kes Zapkus, Siah Armajani, Jim Hyde.

Like Johns, Kes Zapkus creates works with an allover structure in which are secreted figural events. Scattered through a decentralized (though not totally homogenized) field are intense, minute markings, some of which, on examination, are morphologically figurative—images a few years ago of artillery and evidence of war, recently of pictorial and stylistic truisms. Meanwhile, Zapkus's open, labor-intensive compositional process favors results that are deliberately inconclusive.

close examination proved to be munitions. Optically precise, spatially indeterminate, Zapkus' paintings a decade later are no less decision-intensive. Rich with formal incident, they continue to manifest a Structuralist concern for situation and milieu. Indeterminacy as expressed here is phenomenological as well as structural; notable throughout Zapkus' recent work is that the scheme of the grid is not enough: concretion of the grid depends upon deKooningesque actualization of contingencies. Chosen for the exhibition is *Liberation of Past Tense*, 1991, a 14-foot gray encyclopedia of discontinuities, inflected with color and with fugitive clarity of incident (horizons of landscape, architectural plans). Most conspicuously, four schematic globes, each surfaced in a different modern style occupy the canvas's center, and it is this that suggests the painting's paradoxical thematics: the macrocosm of dominant world views engulfed by a provisional and relative microcosm. *Improvisation on a Shrill Sound*, 1987, *Flight into Arrid Zone*, 1988, and *LaFarge and the Chlorinated Pool*, 1988-89, are recent works of dystopia in style.

3 Siah Armajani (b. 1939, Teheran, Iran). In the United States since 1960, Armajani lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. His art may be characterized as either dysfunctional architecture or deconstructed architecture, in which he dismantles and reassembles architectural norms. Either way, his sculptural misreading of houses and bridges manifests an imaginative social reform

Siah Armajani

Is structural contingency the result of a kind of mind-wandering? Not really, for to proceed through the world of the contingent is not to engage in daydreaming; it is rather to enter in the realm of the hypothetical visual structure: if..., then..., if..., then.... Under such conditional circumstances, accidental or apparently mistaken thinking animates necessary considerations of causal or contextual relations in art. Some artists force the issue. If, for instance, in one model for Siah Armajani's series "Dictionary for

emerging from playing semiotic havoc with architecture. Openness informs Armajani's work through and through. Well known is the series "Dictionary for Building, "realized in the 1980s, and anticipated by models fabricated from 1974 to 1978. These "sketches" were taken from the preparatory phase. *Dutch Door*, for instance, displays the familiar thematic ambiguity entailed when aspects of door and window are conflated in the same structure. Violating the norms of domestic order (and propriety) are *Chair Beneath Table* and *Chairs Above Table*. Even more significant than any one of these is the principle of structuralist inversion and play made evident in the assorted "Models for the Dictionary for Building" on view.

Basement Window Under Front Door Steps, 1985

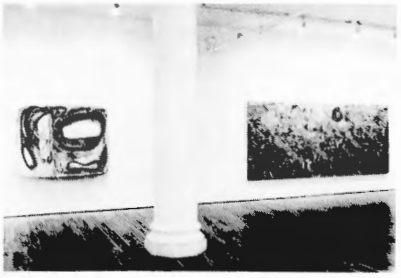
Examples of fully realized work are: *Basement Window Under Front Door Steps*, 1985, and *Closet Under Landing*, 1985. Reference to a Russian Constructivist radio tower suggests utopian motives at the heart of Armajani's project. Indeed, throughout his career freedom and openness of information has pervaded his choice of commissions, which include reading rooms and Building"— fabricated from 1974 to 1978 and realized full-scale in revised form during the 1980s—we note a house excerpted for our appreciation, then the windowed walls, floors, and staircases present themselves as details in a normative vernacular of architecture. If, however, we see a house become dysfunctional thanks to the presence of a casement from which a window has slipped, or a wall hoisted and angled upward and so made dormerlike; or dutch doors rendered ambiguously windowlike; then we are apt to consider Armajani's project as sculpture taking no fixed form, loyal only to an ongoing recombinatory argument about the uneasy relation of function to structure.

reading gardens executed for American universities, where, Armajani maintains, reading is an expression of individual choice.

4 James Hyde (b. 1958 in Philadelphia). A second- generation post-Minimalist, Hyde conflates the so called *a priori* categories of painting, drawing, and sculpture. By bulking the surface of paint into a materially dense slab of fresco, he creates a painting that also acts as a support for a sculptural element, the steel bracket that in turn defines an immaterial plane and volume from wall to floor. This work, called *Suit*, 1991, is typical of Hyde's thwarting of material and categorical self-evidence. Other works of similarly confounded structure: *Resign*, 1991, *Wake*, 1991; *While*, 1991.

5 Ron Gorchov (b. 1930, Chicago). Gorchov achieves ambiguity of relation between virtual and actual space in large measure through the convex-concavity of the support he builds. This saddle-shaped topology, realized topographically, puts considerable english on spatial clarity. Topology, the mathematics of the continuities invariant under deformation, appears here in a metaphoric form to suggest that not all is well in Flatland. Add to the actuality of the saddled-shaped support a virtual space figurally suggestive of the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle, and the torus, and the result is a painting that presents a staged rebellion against the presupposition that flatness is the only modern manifestation of surface warranting imprimatur. Chosen for

Similarly, James Hyde builds art that puts categories in contingent relations. His recollection of the antiformal drift between categories of painting and sculpture, set in motion by the early modernists and recalled cyclically thereafter, raises questions: If this is painting, then what is it doing occupying the floor? If this is sculpture, then why is color broadcast? Here contingency assumes the logic of relative solutions.



Left: Ron Gorchov; right: Kes Zapkus.

Ron Gorchov's shaped canvases may be taken either as a structural anomaly or as a willed

the exhibition is *Zoology*, 1990, from a group of works that includes *Tempest*, 1989, *Zephyros*, 1989.

6 Ovyind Fahlstrom (1928-76). Born in Brazil of Norwegian and Swedish parents, and subsequently sent by them one summer to visit grandparents in Scandinavia, Fahlstrom found himself suddenly cut off from home by the start of World War II. As Fahlstrom's widow says: Imagine the world view that might emerge from the seminal experience of a Portuguese-speaking nine-year-old knowing no word of Swedish, growing up in the household of grandparents whom he had never met, in a country where night reigns most of the year. Even without this testimony of trauma, one can see that situations of weak causality were Fahlstrom's specialty. In his mature art Fahlstrom realized world political board games wherein life's unpredictability is administered only through operational contingency: if x happens thanks to a specific political interest, then y will occur in response; no master plan governs clear hierarchies of value. Aleatory by implication, these games without a goal tease forth the active or imagined intervention of the viewer. On exhibition is *Sitting . . .Six Months Later*, 1962. In manipulating its modules, it is possible to see that continuity of visual language from face to face can be achieved only at the expense of discontinuity elsewhere. Paper dolls and other contingent game structures by Fahlstrom include: *Eddie in the Desert*, 1966, and *Column No. 1 (Wonderbread)*, 1972.

rebellion against the doctrine of flatness by which one kind of modernity has been defined. If his work is seen as a structural anomaly, the cursive painting across the surface may be construed as fanciful calligraphy. If, however, the support, with its paradoxical convex concavity, is seen as a willed misreading of flatness, then the torus and Moebius figures painted on the surface represent the topological analogue to this support, parading their own illusionist riddles by eliding or opposing virtual and actual space and viewpoints—altogether flaunting the nonflatness of the constructed saddle-shaped shield Gorchov has employed. (With their mapping of colors, the hatchwork canvases of Johns similarly super-

impose a topological allusion to space on an optical illusion of space.)

As often noted, indeterminacy in form and content elicits interpretation, or at least enlists interpretive and interactive engagement. The process of interpretation becomes highly evident once intense simultaneity of visual events forces the viewer to wrest sense from apparent busyness and volatility, or, alternatively, with a painting, static and apparently uneventful in the extreme. And this status challenges the viewer to combat his own indifference and to locate sense in the oceanic order of things. Johns is notorious for making art that taxes the interpretive resources of the viewer, and Armajani's destabilized

As far as I know, reception of "The Open Work" was largely positive, yet at least one negative response was extreme. Of the favorable responses, an artist not included in the show has since said repeatedly that whenever he despairs about the situation in the art world he recalls the exhibition, rereads the statement and feels he can sustain himself again. Indirectly, I learned that one dealer, impressed by the show's significance, sent the editor of an art magazine to see it, although no artist of hers was represented. An art writer was kind enough to call the selection of

work in its entirety revealing "exquisite intelligence. "These, in addition to positive responses from two veteran art critics, one formalist, another psychoanalytic, were reassuring. Art critics assigned the exhibition to classes of their students. The show received mention in the press.

Given the muddle that usually suffices for a realized thesis in group shows, I had expected "The Open Work" to be received warmly, yet more than this I had expected a good measure of comprehension. Indeed, my only worry throughout the process of preparation was that the lesson of the show would be too obvious, and so I had decided to cast my gallery statement indirectly, with impressionistic, glancing blows. But one negative response startled me into realizing that callow social historians are not the only people who may suffer from cultural confusion, myopia, or obliviousness.

Susan Sollins, director of Independent Curators Incorporated, was—what? Irritated? Appalled? by "The Open Work," a show she called "incoherent." This comment surprised me because I felt that the principle of structural contingency was extremely pronounced, so I asked her for her criterion for coherence. "Medium," she said. Indeed, ICI has funded a show titled "Drawn in the 80s," but however commonplace this topic is in the curatorial repertory of ideas, medium or technique is precisely the measure of a show with the least *stylistic* or *cultural* coherence. As I orders invite active speculation about uncertain situations; Ovyind Fahlstrom seizes the same prerogative. With game boards, paper dolls, and building blocks, Fahlstrom uses the structures of play to express the simultaneity and interchangeability of cultural entities. He invites our imaginative participation in this cultural politics, if not active intervention in shaping world events. The frustration level is high—as it is meant to be.

Order, provisional and relative, suggests a modern state of affairs known to the Impressionists and Cubists and reworked continually thereafter. In this view, the object disappears. It becomes instead an

sought to explain this, I realized that Sollins' literalist taste was offended at being confronted with comprehending this abstract point. The more our dialogue progressed, the more entrenched in our views both of us became. In desperation, I reminded her that the title "The Open Work" (a direct quote from the essay by Umberto Eco) was intended to signal the commonplace nature of the thesis of the synonymy of indeterminacy and modernity in our age. "You know," I began, "Eco even initiates his discussion of indeterminacy in the arts with mention of the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio, associates of that great composer, Earle Brown."

Suddenly, our confrontation underwent a conversion. "He should hear that," Sollins said quietly. "Earle Brown is my husband."

We were both stupefied. That we could find consensus at all, given our mutual repudiation of each other's views, seemed amazing.

For my part, I continue to wonder on what basis does communication between Sollins and Brown take place. Brown, an associate of John Cage, has devotedly pursued an open compositional strategy in music throughout his career. As with certain Europeans like Stockhausen, Brown's notion of form is decidedly given to performative contingency (so that if a certain musical event arises, then, in consequence, interventions by the performer result); performative choice is hard-wired into his compositional strategy. While some in-

object dissolved in a field of relations.

March 1992

terventions rely on contingency, others that are improvisatory rely on chance. Improvisatory choice in sequencing the piece, guiding tempo, etc., informs Brown's *Available Forms,* 1961-62, as it had in Stockhausen's *Gruppen,* 1955-57 (a work also featuring the aleatory decay of sound). Variable and elastic duration was a factor of indeterminacy Brown had already explored in the early 1950s, when, in an express avowal of the principles informing the art of Pollock and Calder, he began his exploration of kinds of indeterminacy in music.

Several possibilities remain: Sollins may not understand Brown's music; she understands his music yet may be willing to generalize the principles of indeterminacy beyond the practice of her husband; she accepts musical forms of the open work but not the visual equivalents; she can comprehend either if confined to the 1950s, the period most closely identified with indeterminacy in the critical literature; she appreciates all of the above yet believes that coherence breaks down if intellectual imagination, rather than mere consistency, is required.

Many lay people are reassured by consistency, and for this reason subject matter or technique still provides ready, although for the most part bogus, themes for art exhibitions. In the disciplined study of art history, undergraduates learn early on to spot the deceptive nature of subject matter; for, given any two flower paintings, one may parade botanical and documentary information, while the other re-

veals religious encoding; we look to latent content not overt subject matter as a determinant of meaning, and so style. As Meyer Schapiro, in his hermeneutical yet social account of art defines style as constant form—that is, culturally entailed form.

Despite this elementary training in our liberal-arts education, a willed obliviousness to events of the last one hundred years persists in some quarters, and with it the presuppositions of 1827, 1855, 1890, 1913, 1948, and 1968, even by those who profess knowledge of these nodal cultural points in the history of the open work.

December 1992.

PRE-ECHO

Pre-echo: Sound recorded so loud that part of itself may magnetize adjacent windings

Twelve, thirteen, for two came wheeling down,
thirteen, for two darted about your eyes

interpreted as not knowing. A surname
is silenced. As in "tall, if sudden, groves"
or in "scuttled, sudden and tall"
interpretations sewn into the unknown are those

we cannot substantiate. Physiognomy centrifugal,
Indo-European murmur gathering the sail
of he kind sailboat there, Igitur.
Mouth and ear are in centrifuge and unquiet.

Unquiet mouths would give more faithful
rendering of dissemination;
dissemination, ever an almost
perverse pleasure in translating tongues

in miasmas to the ear, through the ear.
Mental lakes close and correlated,
green lakes of filial piety
surely of, with and through the ear.

Torn from the ear obediently
this pieced entirety, in sepia
and insentient, a piece of which
lake is correlated to the ear.

A piece of the puzzle, rotated and blank,
in light pain,
the weight of existence
rotating the blank island,

chafing against the flesh inscape
of unjustified seeking.
Bleak notation for nostrils lower left
in regard of that flesh estuary

pressed from pulp and paper
for a perennial alphabet of lesser mortals—
primarily a thing to be read, you decided.
Select the size and face of type,

in 12-point figure-landscape, all exile
in these islands: dressed
companionable islands, dressed in phenomena.
Eclipse, exiling fullness. Irremissible,

irremissible solitude which constitutes a man.
Every visage, metalinguistic;
unblinking lakes in vague visage stretched across stretchers
which constitute a man.

Unblinking nonmimetic lakes taped to the cheek,
and here physiognomic truth-functions inhabit
a logically scented and nonspecific
self vindicated at all four corners, a kind of facial site.

Adrift in such skin, our iteration,
our iteration with which countries cannot vie, transliteration
    secretly abetting impenetrable baptism.
Portents of Rome, is this itinerant baptism abetting ours?
Adrift is the handkerchief

of which the paternity is known,
albeit threaded with thoroughly perplexed reference.
That blotted tongue, that thoroughly bollixed signature
    perplexing an anteriority
we cannot substantiate, this, despite known paternity.

Thirteen, for two darted about the eyes.
And the contingencies were attuned if irreducible;
attuned, if irreducible. And yet and yet.
Darting about the eyes, very near. In the darling eye.

DRASTIC MEASURES

List names of persons.
With ski mask we approach the registrar.
Lacking imperative water, we staggered toward the registrar,
listing names of persons, dates of tenure.

Youth indicated
like a giant footprint;
the artist's imprimatur,
indicted. Such is youth.

An epistemological equivalent of hives or cystitis, indicating the
    ideological body is not well
manages the volatile brew;
managing the brew, volatile and abundant
hives indicate our body.

You're impossible! All right, you're improbable.
An odor.
An odor rotating,
improbably you.

An odor shelved, or was it disallowed?
Stench in all singleness of heart,
a stench-filled room,
an odor of dereliction the library disallowed.

Whether malodorous people impinge
on others' rights
or the right of way
is an issue of free speech in some liberal resentment.

As we suffer a restaurant's good intentions,
odors, probabilities;
the new poets'
intentional restaurants.

At Princeton, the guys speak of restaurants
red,
feeling red—
the guys speaking of restaurants, the gals of intentionality,

as we did, as we might have done.
Feeling read
feeling read, an ontological claim said to inhere in the
    phenomenal
deeds we did, deeds we might have done.

GUITARS AND TIGERS

Motionless against guy wires
across the loins in fixity
to fix reference rather than to give meaning
or synonym for "guitar"

is "the length of S" designating the waxy
mentality plucked in leisure time;
time study: the study of work.
"The length of S" and "the length of S"

designating the same thing, waxing
this red. This red and that
wisp of red apprehension,
this in pursuant to directedness,

this business reply card.
"The length of S" designates a mention: Sloan-Kettering;
"The length of S" and "the length of S" and "the length of S,"
this, in exit

one meter long. Although a standard has no length,
the unmarked straightedge affixed there
refers now to a large Asian carnivore
having a tawny coat traversely striped with black.

HENRY COWELL PLAYS THE STANDARDS

Science and Technology in Art Today
"These fragments I have shored. . ."

Modern American Usage
"From the steeples and mountains. . ."

To the Finland Station
The Poetics of Roman Ingarden

"I wandered lonely as a cloud. . ."
The Visionary Company

The arachnid in art, these spinnerets from which. . .
these fragments I have shored. . .
these fractions converted to a failure,
these spinnerets from which issue silk

"filament, filament, filament"
from steeples to mountains far from being perturbed,
far from being perturbed more perfectly
in a litany of casting forth of

silk and number, or accolade:
"which consists in touching the recipient's cheek with one's own,
in touching the recipient with one's own usage,
Modern American Usage,

in which—acquiesce" meets "assent."
Auxiliary vines are strangling our factory;
a wall indecipherable within the stranglehold of vine.
Acquiesce, meaning "assent" or "submit."

To the Finland Station, a destiny.
Overgrown would suggest nonutility
of chimneys or of a sensitive child.
This Way to the Waiting Room, go toward it but never attain

n-dimensional mentality. Throughout form-consciousness
strata come forth to upend curricula.
Nomenclature uncut. Strata come forth: Take courage!
In whatever alleged mentality, "valleys shall be raised up, and
mountains made plain."

These spinnerets from which issue failure drawn out
firm yet elastic, ductile
"till the ductile anchor hold"—
a finer technology in art, and he knew it.

The arachnid in art, these spinnerets from which. . .
these fragments I have shored. . .
these fractions converted to a failure,
these spinnerets from which issue steeples rotating

and minarets secreted from the abdomen
to enact the casting forth of effort,
to accelerate the casting forth of—
unfortunate minarets

bound in silk and number, not accolade:
"which consists in touching the recipient's cheek with one's
own"
in touching the recipient with one's own usage,
Modern American Usage,

usage. "Acquiesce," meeting "dream"
on brick, ivy-laden,
ivy in ideological stranglehold,
meaning "assent" or "submit."

To the Finland Station.
Overgrown would suggest nonutility
of disused speech
after years affianced to exile. A figure, stationary

in disbelief. Overgrown would suggest nonutility
"simply by writing the simple word 'not.'"
If not, then not
in variegated stranglehold, overgrown light

and railway ties awash in creosote.
"As a cloud,—
as a cloud now overgrown,
as a cloud now overgrown the recipient's cheek.

BRAIN RAIN

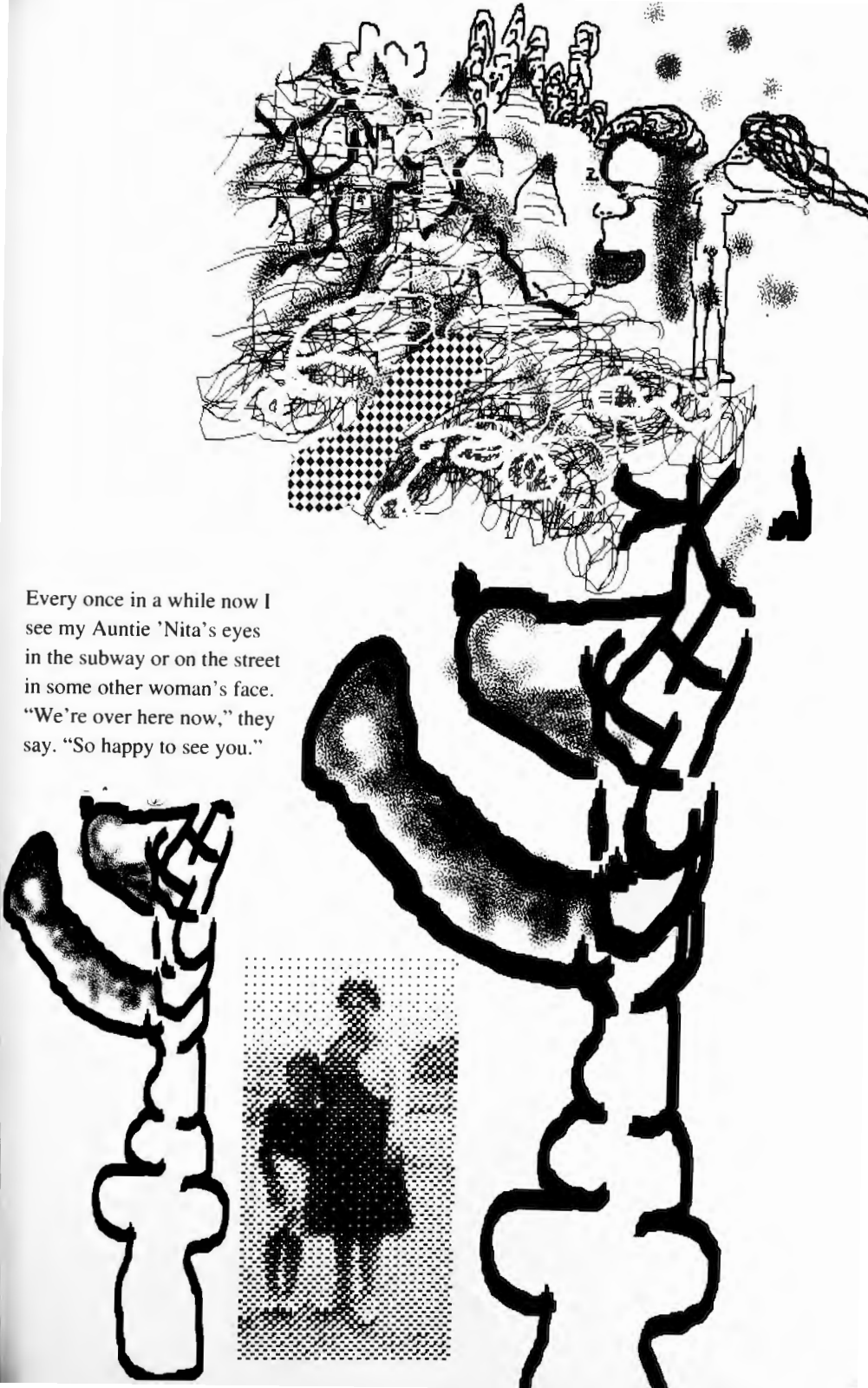
Tipping one's head back can have pleasurable consequences.

PAMELA WYE

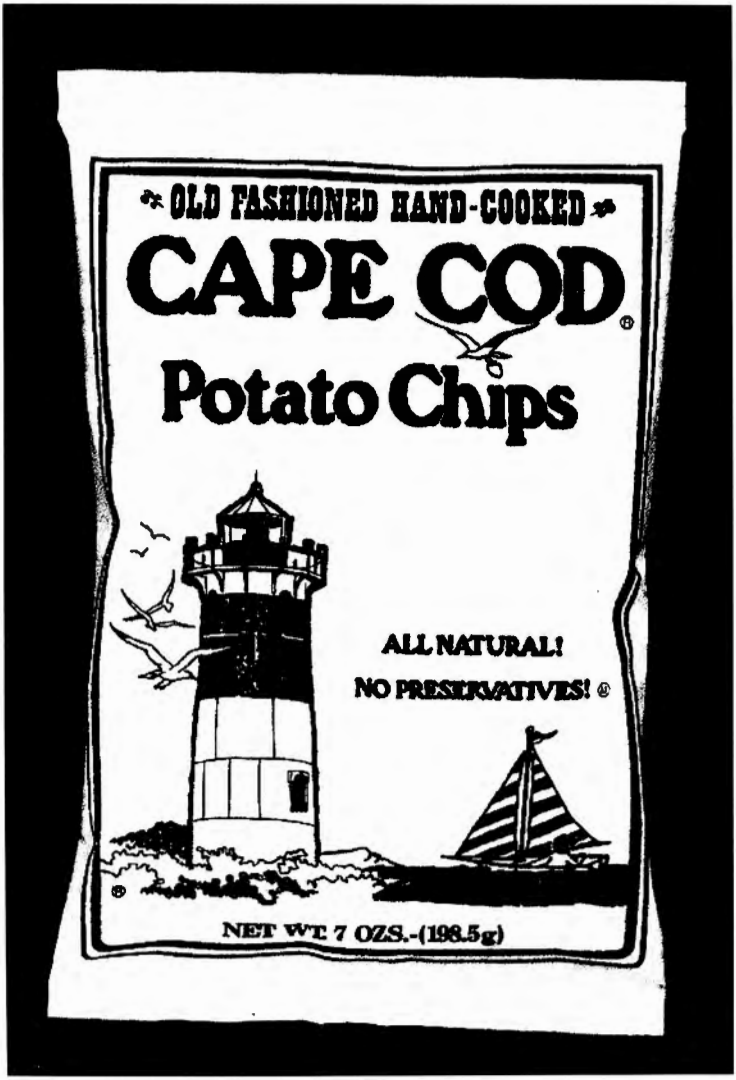
2

Uncle Willie rolled Oreos down the driveway for his dog to chase. The dog had no face.

you



Every once in a while now I see my Auntie 'Nita's eyes in the subway or on the street in some other woman's face. "We're over here now," they say. "So happy to see you."



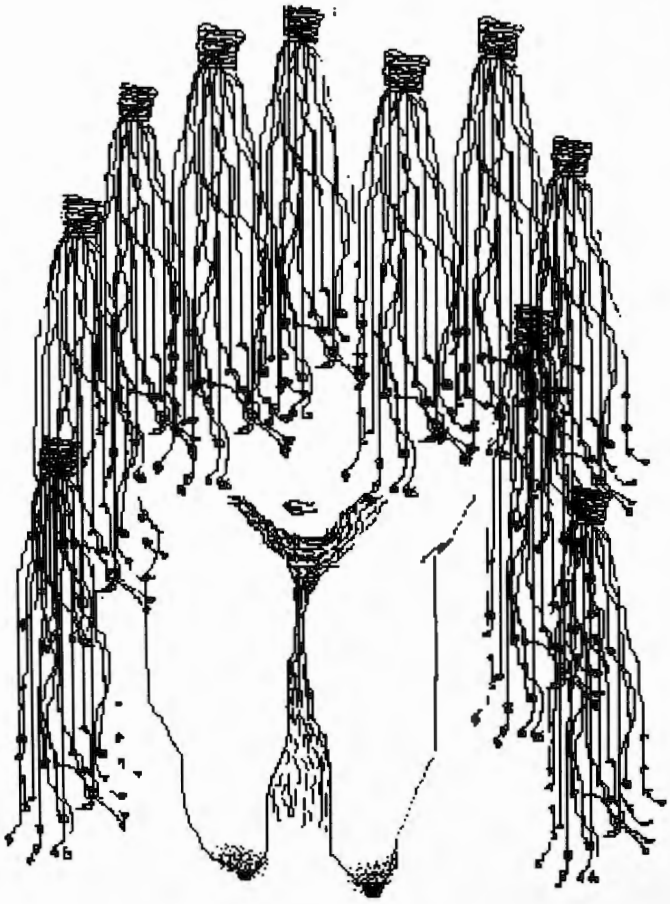
I was in the "Snacks" aisle of the King Charles Supermarket on Havemeyer Street in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn (a neighborhood that, as a real estate agent told me, "has your three ethnic groups: your Hasidics, your Hispanics, and your Artists"), when I found myself reaching for a large bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips from among a cloud-like stack of what could have been a heretofore unpublished edition of Warhol pillows. As I am not a potato chip connoisseur, I have never tasted Cape Cod Potato Chips. So I cannot say I wanted to buy them because I thought they tasted better than, say, Wise Potato Chips. Nor because the package sported a tiny drawing of a chip hanging from the claws of a swooping seagull to form the dot above the "i" in the word "Chips." No, I gently

closed my fingers around the bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips because it was summer and I remembered how my parents used to drive down from Boston to the Cape practically every Sunday when I was a kid and how we would sing the Whiffenpoof Song on the way home in the car at night so that to this day "we are poor little lambs who have lost our way, Bah Bah Bah" is linked in my mind to the charred and barren stretches of a burned-down forest that we would usually be driving past at around the time we were singing that song (we never sang a song just once), and how in the car we could still feel the ocean water in our lungs when we breathed deeply, and how we could still taste the salt on our skin if we licked our arms.

As I examined the airy package of Cape Cod Potato Chips (white like the deck of a ship), I savored the clumsy red and blue drawing of a big-bodied boy in a toy-like sailboat, whose back was turned to me and to the fact that he was about to crash into the fairly well-drawn, though curiously thick around the middle lighthouse on the left side of the package despite some adeptly drawn seagulls' frantic cries of warning that he seemed not to hear because his gaze was fixed in communion (à la German Romantic painters) on the horizon that extended out beyond the back of the package of chips. I accepted without question all that this drawing proposed because I affectionately imagined that some elderly retiree who had recently taken up art after a life of dreadful monotony as an accountant for the Gillette Company in Boston had dreamed it up while sitting on his screened-in breezeway in Falmouth, or perhaps Wellfleet. What gave me pause, however, as I was about to carefully lay this package of chips into my shopping cart were the letters across the top of the bag in red, old-fashioned typeface (the kind you see on Wanted posters in the Old West) that spelled out the words "Hand-Cooked." The image of a 30's-ish, overweight woman, a year-round resident of the Cape with a white paper cap holding back her hair, leaning over a vat of boiling oil, dropping in raw potato slices one by one *by hand* flashed before my eyes. And that was it. I put the big bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips back on the shelf, not because I wanted to put anyone out of job, but because the image of this woman, followed by that of many more women standing in endlessly replicating rows, inside non-descript buildings up and down the Cape, hand-cooking these chips for my casually mindless consumption ruined my appetite. Although I imagined that perhaps sometime in the future, on the occasion of a full-blown binge, the kind where I would eat myself into a trance of discomfort, I imagined that then, perhaps, this image of a woman, who could after all be me, in a dead-end job, hand-cooking slices of potato year in and year out, "one batch at a time" according to the advertising copy, would fuel the loathing and frustration I would be feeling toward the ways of the world and that I would turn inward with every chip that I hand-fed into my mouth, and I imagined that I might, at that particular moment in the future, buy myself a big bag of Cape Cod Potato Chips. Maybe even two.

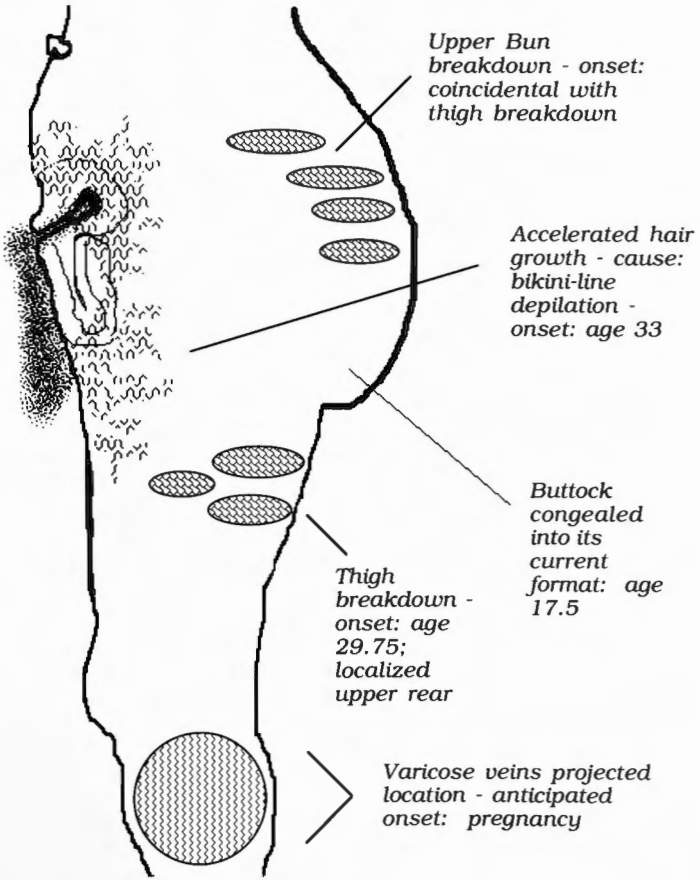
TRUE

BODY



Prehistoric Rendering of Woman Who Never Shaved Her Armpits

FACTS


Upper Bun breakdown - onset: coincidental with thigh breakdown
Accelerated hair growth - cause: bikini-line depilation - onset: age 33
Buttock congealed into its current format: age 17.5
Thigh breakdown - onset: age 29.75; localized upper rear
Varicose veins projected location - anticipated onset: pregnancy

Modern Body Breakdown Chart: Young Adult: Female

INVENTORY

One Legal Secretary's Desktop, 1992:

Ceramic clown picture frame with real lace collar and cotton pompom at the tip of his hat: picture of husband.

Heart-shaped gold picture frame: picture of husband.

Sailboat picture frame that rocks, with "Puerto Rico" in raised letters: picture of husband.

"Born to Exercise" magnet.

Snoopy dog pen with tongue and tail that wag if you lift its ears.

Purple plastic palmtree drink stirrer.

Miniature digital clock in the form of a computer terminal.

Green rabbit's foot key-chain with an "Erin Go Bragh" button hanging on a green satin ribbon.

Plastic tulip pen.

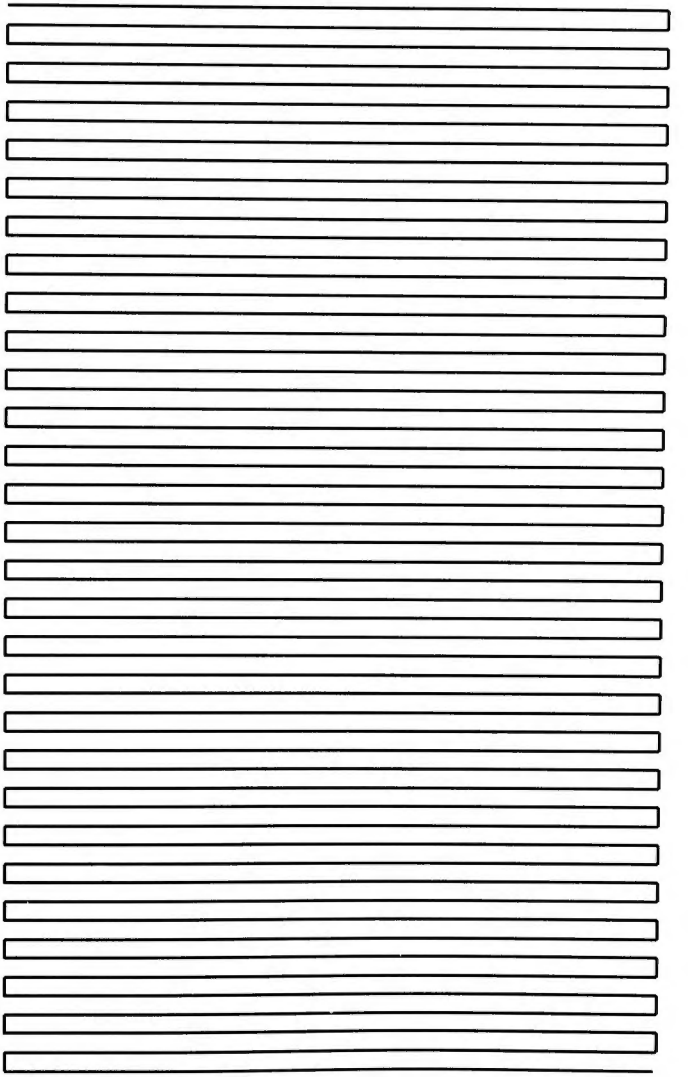
Turtle candle with raised letters "Loving You Is What I Do Best."

When we entered the funeral parlor, I was surprised to find Uncle Willie still there the way we'd left him the night before. We would never have dreamed of obliging Willie to get together with us two days in a row. And making him the conspicuous center of attention would have been unthinkable. We would have permitted him to slip out unobtrusively when he felt the need to be alone.

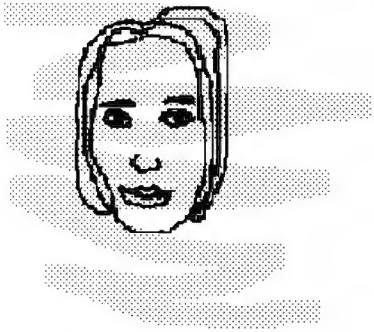
But there he was, surrounded by white satin, his face more drawn than I remembered it and pinker than I'd ever seen it.

"Isn't it great that they put on his vest and his glasses?" my sister whispered before they closed Willie's casket.

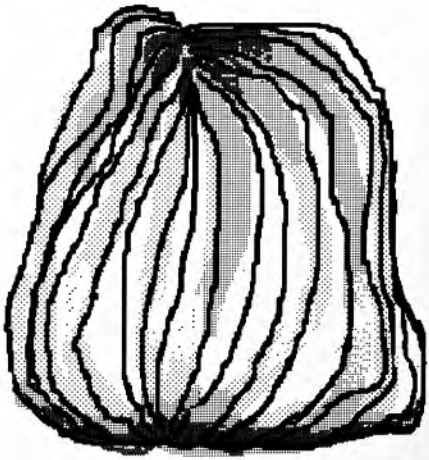
"Yeah," I said but I wished they'd included one of his Italian hats, his thick woolen overcoat, his heavy camera with the big flash, a stack of books, one of the cigar boxes he'd filled with pictures he'd taken of us over the years, a phone, some magazines, some ham sandwiches and ice cream bars and a couple of those half blue, half red pencils with a sharpened point at either end.



When she got to work, she saw she had a new co-worker.



"You will pay for all the bad things that have happened to me," said the new woman.



It wasn't until she

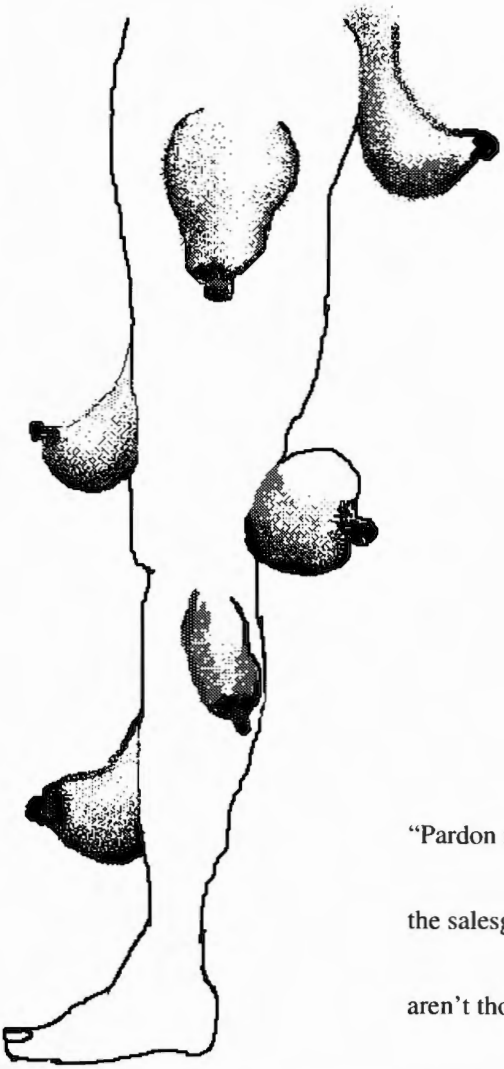
went shopping

during her lunch

hour that she

noticed the breasts

on her leg.



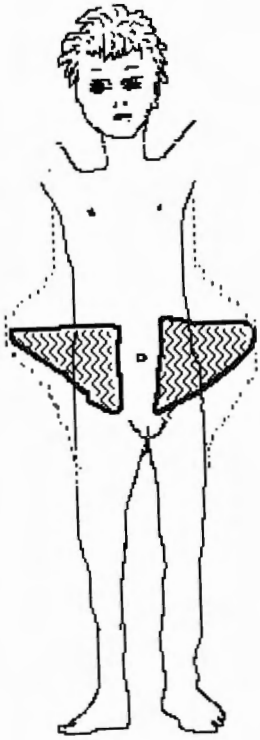
"Pardon me," said

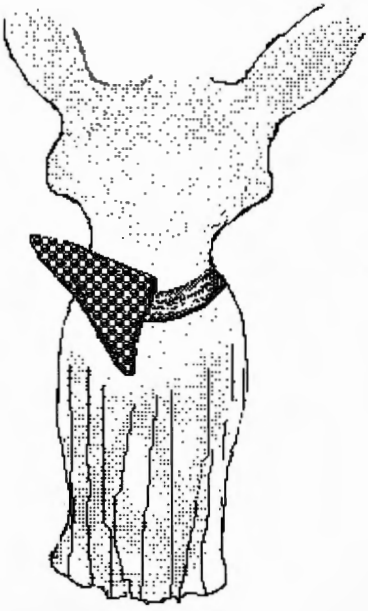
the salesgirl. "But

aren't those breasts

on your leg?"

Then





Now

Then

In second grade, I'd get stomach aches after my parents fought like cats and dogs, like sticks and stones at breakfast.

"It's just gas pockets," I said when Miss Minerva walked me back to class from the girls' room. My mother had told me that's what it was.

I imagined gas pockets were triangular like apple turnovers or ladies' shoulder pads, I imagined they got stuck in the corner near the hip bone. I never told anyone, it seemed obvious.

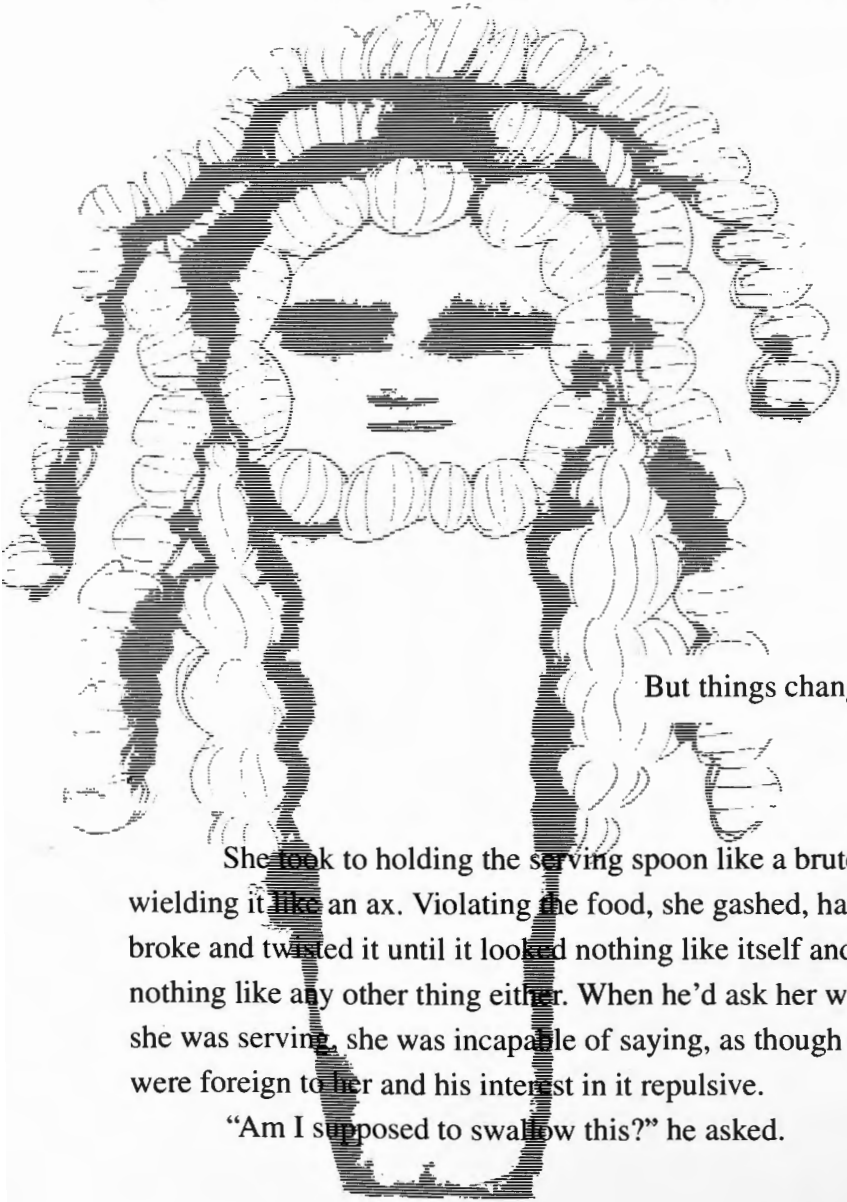
Now

For Christmas my mother gave me a belt that buckled at the hip and over the buckle was a stuffed triangle of alligator skin like an apple turnover or a lady's shoulder pad. So I told her about the gas pockets.

"You never had stomach aches," she said. She was adamant.

Their Story

His eyes were like rare and opulent jewels that had been misplaced. She was like a hollow doll that sometimes tipped over. They married young and were happy for a while.

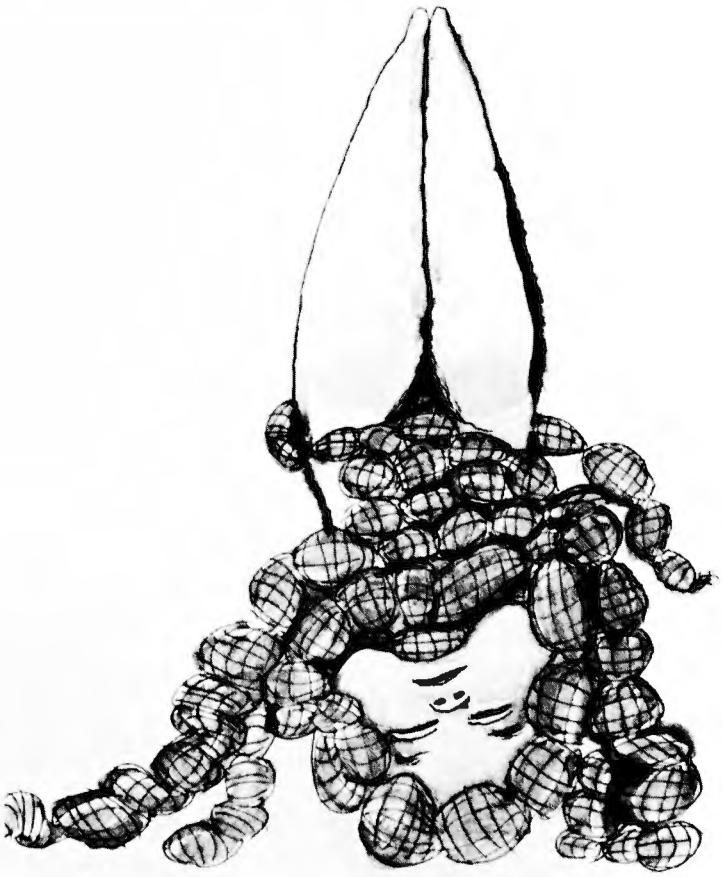


But things changed.

She took to holding the serving spoon like a brute and wielding it like an ax. Violating the food, she gashed, hacked, broke and twisted it until it looked nothing like itself and nothing like any other thing either. When he'd ask her what she was serving, she was incapable of saying, as though food were foreign to her and his interest in it repulsive.

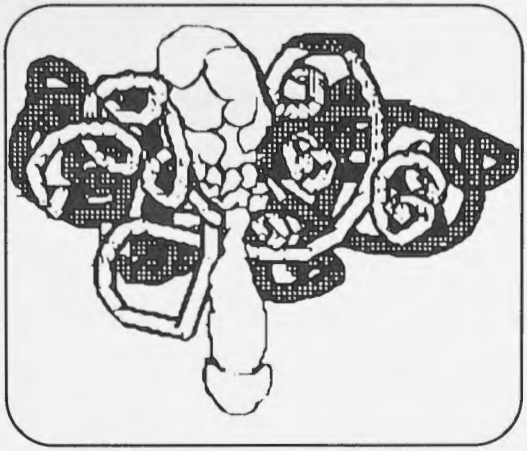
"Am I supposed to swallow this?" he asked.

At some point, she became enthralled with a song. She sat and listened to the record over and over, day after day, and couldn't stop. She neglected the things he expected of her - cooking, dishes, laundry - she couldn't break away. One day while he was out, she smelled smoke, realized the building was burning, but couldn't move. She died in the fire.



SOUVENIR

WILD



No, I don't.

Shorty Is Alive & Well & Making Movies for Warner Bros.

Over a year ago when asked by Spike Lee to write words of praise for his film *Mo Better Blues* which is one of the most embarrassing and corny films purporting to be about "the music" I know, I wrote instead about all of his films, and the essence of this was that in general Spike Lee's approach to black people in his flicks was very superficial, that he tended to view black life as a cartoon, and instead of seeking depth and balance in this portraits of Afro America, he usually opted for caricature.

Spike has been quoted saying how outraged he was by my analysis. I went on to say, when asked by a group of young people what I thought about Spike's making the Malcolm X film, that I hoped he would not do to Malcolm what he had done to black people generally, i.e. approach Malcolm's life superficially or as a cartoon. I hoped, for instance, that he would not make the film *mostly* about that part of Malcolm's life when he was known as Detroit Red, the pimp, dope dealer, hustler and thief. But I predicted that he probably would do just that.

I said I hoped Spike would not distort Malcolm's life, or make it seem that in the end Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's views were indistinguishable. So that ultimately, Spike's Malcolm would be a typical bourgeois attempt to deMalcolmize Malcolm, and allow petty bourgeois Negroes who always hated or were disturbed by Malcolm to breathe easier knowing that the militancy of the actual Malcolm X had finally been laid to rest.

There has been, since then, a lot of back and forth. For one thing, Spike Lee has never been able to answer my questions and charges and predictions with any open defense of his ideological stance for making his movies the way he has made them. His trashing of black women in *She's Gotta Have It.* His trashing of Black Schools in *School Daze.* His belittling of the black liberation movement, apology for the police murders of black youth (Radio Rahim is killed for playing his radio too loud) and early attack on Islam and his open embrace of middle class nigger prostitution by kneeling in the dust to scoop up the cash, in *Do the Right Thing* (which he

said was to be about Howard Beach!). His trashing of black music and black artists and the black family in *Mo Better*. His upholding of apartheid and sexual racial stereotyping (why was the sister making so much noise when she made love in the flick?) and the need for the black community to kill black youth hooked on drugs, in *Jungle Fever*.

He could never exchange ideological polemics about these because he is a Philistine, i.e., someone who pretends to welcome struggle, but instead is, to quote Lenin, "a hollow gut of fear," instead he would simply talk bad about me and even lie. As he has in his latest you've seen the flick now read the book, *X*.

But for all Spike's attempts to divert attention from the ideological and political essence of my analysis of his earlier films, what I said and what I feared he would do to Malcolm's life have been proven very clearly in his distorted version of Malcolm's life. If anything Spike has done even more damage than I expected.

For one thing he has completely destroyed the actual chronology of Malcolm's life. Just as he had done in a "4th draft" script I received anonymously, shortly after our public exchange began. Spike claimed at the Abyssinia Church at a Malcolm X memorial that he had changed that script. But the essential foulness of that script remains.

In distorting the actual chronology of Malcolm's life, he has almost completely removed Malcolm's childhood and youth. The film begins focusing on Malcolm as Detroit Red. And the first person we see in the film is Spike Lee as Detroit Red's "sidekick" and partner in crime, getting ready to "conk" Malcolm's hair.

The entire early part of Malcolm's life is nixed, and appears at most as flashbacks in the pimp's mind. The life and influence upon Malcolm of his Garveyite father and Grenadian nationalist mother, are almost totally absent, except for superficial and abstract fragments "imaged" from time to time through Detroit Red's mind.

The Klan attacks, his father's brutal murder, his mother being driven crazy by the state and his brothers and sisters dispersed just as in chattel slavery. All this material is dispersed as well, shredded, disconnected, used, at best, to give some very minor tragic dimension to the general hahaha "carefree" life of RED & SHORTY IN COONTOWN, which Lee (&, of course, Warner Bros.) seems to relish.

In fact there is a severe let down in intensity after the long long focus on the pimp dope white prostitute life of crime of Shorty and Red, who Spike has outfitted in Zoot Suits that seem to have come straight from Barnum and Bailey. Spike has not sought to recreate the actuality of the Zoot Suit, he thinks it simply clownish attire.

By removing the chronological development of Malcolm's life and using it only as random flashbacks the psychological and philosophical

raison d'etre for young Malcolm Little becoming partially lumpenized (destroyed by capital) and being transformed from the son of two righteous black nationalists, one murdered one driven crazy, is destroyed.

We never really know, emotionally, why Malcolm is doing what we see him doing. And Spike thinks it's all fun. Spike, by the way, appears in the film as Shorty for a longer period than Al Freeman's Elijah Muhammad!

The Detroit Red business runs at least an hour. It is almost a film in itself! There is a marked let down of passion throughout the rest of the film, even though the time, place and condition of the rest of Malcolm's life, his continued political development, and the historical context and impact of his changes are among the most objectively passionate nexus of personalities and events in recent history. And even though the film is over three hours long, Spike chooses to leave out some of the most important aspects of Malcolm's life! It is as if the film had been shaped by the "powers that be" to remove what is most harmful to their interest and to leave in that which helps them out the most.

The two most damning aspects of the film, and the acts that identify Spike Lee clearly as a dangerous opportunist and mouthpiece for the most backward sector of the black petty bourgeois is his willingness to blame the Nation of Islam for murdering Malcolm X, thereby absolving the government (the CIA and FBI). In fact, Spike uses the only dialogue he gives the FBI to trash Martin Luther King on the way out.

He gives Malcolm a throwaway line about how perhaps the FBI or CIA is helping the Nation of Islam stalk him. But this is all. Spike never looks with any depth on the work of U.S. government agencies to undermine Malcolm, Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam. For Spike, like all liberals, black people's worst problem is ourselves, and Malcolm's betrayal and assassination merely one more black on black crime.

Whatever we believe, Malcolm X is dead, and The Nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan still alive. For the most reactionary sector of U.S. society the idea of making Malcolm a confused and naive martyr betrayed and murdered by the Nation of Islam is perfect. This is the reason why the film was made, to use Malcolm against the Nation of Islam. And how slick to get a Negro to do it.

Equally as deadly is the completely superficial versions of Malcolm's trips to Africa. Malcolm's visit to Egypt, in this flick, is as a tourist, to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx and nothing else. There is no mention of his visit with the revolutionary Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser.

The rest of Malcolm's African tour is not mentioned at all. Nor his private audiences with the leading African revolutionaries of the time. Not only did he meet and talk to Nasser, but Nyerere of Tanzania, Touré of Guinea, Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, as well as Obote of Uganda and Kenyatta in Kenya. On this trip to Africa, Malcolm spent 18

weeks, and he talked to many other African, Asian and Arab leaders, and some white ones as well. Malcolm openly speaks of the influence of these meetings on his thinking. Malcolm says of those meetings, that they were so important because, "it gave me a chance to sample their thinking. I was impressed by their analysis of the problem, and many of the suggestions they gave went a long way toward broadening my own outlook."

Spike wants this "broadening" of outlook to be simply Malcolm's no longer saying that the white man is the devil. This is the reason for the colorful, though hardly enlightening, pageantry Spike gives Malcolm's Hajj to Mecca. Malcolm is betrayed by Elijah Muhammad and so he embraces the true Islam and no longer hates white people. He is then murdered with a smile on his face, knowing his martyr time has come. Like the doomed idiot in *Of Mice & Men.*

It was important that the further transformation of Malcolm X, who had become El Hajj Malik Shabazz after the Mecca trip, never be revealed, or what he found out as Omowale, the son come home, which is the name he was given in Africa. Why, because even though Malcolm said his trip to Mecca did help him understand that it takes all the varieties of people in the world to make up the world, the final expansion of his thinking was the consolidation of a sharper anti-imperialist edge to its focus.

True, Malcolm was no longer satisfied with being a black nationalist, but having seen that African revolutionaries were also anti-capitalist as well as anti-racist, he is quoted on returning from Africa: "You show me a capitalist, I'll show you a blood sucker." December 20, 1964. Or, "It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a vulture. It used to be strong enough to go and suck anybody's blood whether they were strong or not. But now it has become more cowardly, like the vulture, and it can only suck the blood of the helpless. As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It's only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely." This last quote was made one month before his assassination.

In the old Muslim coffee shop, in Spike's movie, when Malcolm asks him to come with him into the Nation of Islam, Shorty says, naw, he loves pork and white women too much. And Shorty insists to the end that it is all a con anyway. We know now, that when Elijah Muhammad is shown in the film, principally as a lecherous womanizer and Malcolm's best friends in the Nation betray him that Shorty was correct after all. It was all a con. All serious struggle against the status quo is. And just to make sure we believe this Shorty has made this film for us. We saw him on television at the premiere, he calls himself Spike Lee now.

(In my opinion the best thing Spike and Co. could do, if they have any relationship to the masses of the American people, they would permit open discussions after each showing of the film, in theaters all over the world. Then, even though the brothers Warner are going to make at least a quarter of a billion dollars on the film, there would be some value in it for the people as well.)

—AMIRI BARAKA

NOTICINGS 1992

"the cope of flesh the amethyst morse of pain"
—Kenneth Rexroth, *A Prolegomenon to a Theodicy*

"In the green shadow of the lamplight absolute reality is all I am interested in, the light shining on the silver edge of these keys, the magic formation of the letters in rows upon the green field of the paper, looking like the shadowed corner of a garden, elaborating on none of this, entering into communion with it, picking up speed as I go further in, looking out that nothing disturbs me from it, this place, which cd. be called,
magic, but which
is not, is only
here, 707
Scott Street, San Francisco"
—John Weiners, *Journal 1959*

"There are some good spots of speed in his hands"
—Teddy Charles on drummer Stan Levey, 1955

"achieves that rest, that stability at such a pitch that only the barest margin is left between the organization of form & color achieved & the wildest conceivable disorder"
—Robert Duncan to Pauline Kael, 28VII44

"You gotta eat shit with a shovel to have a big hit. It's all about having little focus groups nailing what makes the assholes go ha-ha."
—Richard Price, screenwriter of *Sea of Love*

I saw that a star was really *in* the branches of a tree but wouldn't let me get close enough to see if it was as small as it looked.

Poetry with: mess, risk, and an ecstatic velocity, the feeling that it's all collapsing every second in change, up for grabs, in sheer lack of security the next word has not yet arrived

any disruption of Language As Usual

"Vicious felt himself in an impossible situation: he was the newest member of a group that he at once hated and thought was the best in the world, and they were so inactive that he wasn't sure whether they (or he) existed."

—Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming*

What are the results of being relentlessly specific, literally momentary? No irony, no metaphor (unless it all is, totally metonymic?), etc. Every possible attribute of the mind's longest breath in an undefined direction.

"No one is ever too old to be a sideman."

—David Meltzer

Dream: I rise from the underground rubble slats once again into further Zane City (Euro-Berlin-Leningrad?) and think again on what a genius is Sinatra.

"Later that night the two couples went to a six-day bicycle race. The Velodrome was lit by arc lights, and the crowd was hysterical. At odd, surprising intervals pistols were fired to start new sprints, and loudspeakers made urgent unintelligible announcements, while prizes were bestowed with great solemnity on people for no evident reason."

—Geoffrey Wolff, *Black Sun*

"I want a candidate whose qualities are no longer extraneous."

—Professor Irwin Corey

". . .replacing the mythic level of narrative or thematic development with the microscopic level of moment-attending (implying that the seed of the moment held the energy of all possible future flow-into-form)."

—Richard Foreman, *During the Second Half of the Sixties*

When the only star I can see is just a hole in a tree. . .

"I want to see the *work*, not just what somebody has decided to publish."
—Michael Palmer

"It is that I have now achieved an age of no caesurae"
—Barrett Watten, *Under Erasure*

"What the camera does, and does uniquely, is to *photograph thought.*"
—Orson Welles, *This Is Orson Welles*

"Jazz is born by somebody goofin'"
—Art Blakey, 1976

"Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society working as a team."
—John Ashbery, *Hotel Lautréamont*

"his music, his noises, his silent concerto, his readings, his growing grass at an art show, his mycological scholarship—every performance, every activity, was like a sermon by Spike Jones."
—Larry Rivers speaking of John Cage in *What Did I Do?*

Blade Runner, Ridley Scott's cut:
How do we tell if it's human? Because it recalls things from the book of the humans?

"I get tired
of all the chairs in the park
if I had to use a word in stead of a bullet to describe man
I would call him creep"
—Piero Heliczer, *Carillon Booty*

"The body—it's no more than a theater of mirrors
turned 'within', by an unreliable cloudy vision. I
don't need to write about everything to convince myself
that maybe what's written exists. But there's another
reason: it's the sweetness of replacing myself with not-me."
—Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *Xenia*

"What did she die of?"
"End."
"Some things I find myself."
—William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*

—CLARK COOLIDGE

3 Notes, 2 Stars and a Comet

In the continuing recovery of neglected American women poets, I'm surprised no one has picked up on Muriel Rukeyser: a strange case of a well-known but unread poet who never really formed alliances with anyone. She started out in the 1930s as a Yale Younger Poet and Communist Party member, but her documentary poetry was too modernist for the Party, too documentary for the modernists, and too modernist and documentary for the ruling New Critics. In the 1940s, though her friendships were with New York literary establishment types, she was notoriously trashed by Randall Jarrell and never fully accepted by them. In the '50s and early '60s she essentially dropped out to raise her child, and had no connection to the clans of the *New American Poets*. In the late '60s she was highly visible as an antiwar activist and wrote some of her best poetry, but—even as late as 1968, was anyone ready for a long lyric poem that begins with the lines: "Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis / Who ever despises the penis despises the cunt"?

In 1979, a year before her death, Norton published a massive *Collected Poems*, full of wonderful and awful poems, and strange items like a book-length poem on the life of Wendell Wilkie. All her work was out of print in the '80s. Now *Triquarterly* has published a selected poems edited by Kate Daniels, appropriately called *Out of Silence*. It's not bad, but the more conventional work is emphasized, and the book itself disfigured by the reiteration of the ugliest dingbat in memory (an uncoiled tasselled curtain tie between every poem!). Norton is planning a *Reader* of her poetry and prose, and a biography by Daniels is in the works. Meanwhile, *Out of Silence* is a place to begin, but it's far more interesting to dig up a copy of the *Collected* and wander by one's self.

* * *

Best first book I've read recently is Myung Mi Kim's *Under Flag* (Kelsey St. Press). Kim, born 1957, is a Korean-American woman who came to the U.S. as a child. Hers is a "poem with history," and her history is the Korean War and the American occupation under the flag of which she was raised. Further evidence that the entry of history into the poetry written by American women is an engaging, sometimes thrilling recent development. A way pointed to by Rukeyser and Lorine Niedecker (however obscured by LN's male handlers)—but the major influence here is, of course, Susan Howe. History as her story not only opens an infinite possibility of subject matter, but also strange and fresh takes on the language used to tell the tale of the tribe. Only white boys think content is dead.

* * *

Blaise Cendrars is the great comet of French poetry. Born in 1887 in Switzerland, his life would take pages to summarize: perpetual traveller from Vladivostok to Rio to Hollywood, poet, filmmaker, merchant seaman, soldier who lost an arm in World War I, publisher, journalist, novelist, resistance fighter in World War II—a man actively involved with nearly everyone, in all the arts, in the modernist explosion. Though he lived until 1961, all of his poetry was written in the twelve years between 1912 and 1924. (After that he wrote prose.) Among those works is the single greatest poem-object of the century, the 1913 *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* published as a folding seven-foot sheet covered with hallucinatory colors by Sonia Delaunay. For some reason, he has been less known in the U.S. than his contemporary and equal, Apollinaire. The best previous edition, the New Directions *Selected Writings*, with translations by John Dos Passos, among others, is long out of print.

Now we have Ron Padgett's translation—an instant classic—of Cendrars' *Complete Poems*, published in a beautiful edition by the University of California Press that unfortunately relegates the French to minuscule type in the back of the book. These funny, reportorial, documentary, sentimental, sometimes found poems were ultimately a dead end: Of the three (French) greats in the 1910s (Cendrars, Apollinaire and Reverdy), clearly Reverdy had the greatest influence in France over the rest of the century. (There's an argument to be made that "Zone" is the most internationally influential poem of the century.) Perhaps because Cendrars' poems have almost no imitators (perhaps Michel Butor) they remain lively and (except for the occasional whore-with-a-heart-of-gold) undated. And they're even better in Padgett's tour-de-force deadpan performance, which I heard in New York last fall. Thanks to the *Complete Poems* and two other new translations—*Modernities*, a collection of prose poems and essays in an excellent translation by Esther Allen and Monique Chefdor, and *Sky*, one volume of the four-part often fictitious memoir, translated by Nina Rootes—the Cendrars comet, on a 76-year cycle like Halley's, is finally visible over North America.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

UTOPIA UNDER THE VOLCANO: The Cuban Avant-Garde in Mexico

Gone are the days of the Havana-Veracruz overnight cruise ship. Gone is Pérez Prado's pre-punk hairdo and his *"Ay pero que rico y sabroso bailan el mambo las mexicanas. . ."*("Oh, it's delicious, it's delightful, the way the women in Mexico dance the mambo. . ."). Gone are the days when Cuban painters of the '40s, like Mariano Rodríguez and René Portocarrero, stood gaping in front of Diego Rivera's mural at the Ministry of Public Education.

Since then—that is, after Castro's revolution—cultural contacts between Mexico and Cuba seem to have been reduced to the binational following of *pachucos* and *cheos*, both equally and obsessively loyal to salsa music and mariachi bands. Even after 1959, of course, ties continued between the two countries. While the tacky lower-middle classes of Mexico vacationed at the Havana Hilton for fifty dollars a night, Mexico City began to crawl with Cuban agents "supporting the subversion," and exiles from Miami who came to have their picture taken at the pyramids, or to buy nickel-silver rosaries at the Zócalo.

Nearly fifty years would have to go by before the Cuban avant-garde returned to Mexico—and not just in the visual arts.[1] This time, though, there seems to have been fewer motivations and many more obstacles along the way. No longer was there a reason to come in search of a Utopia. No longer did painters feel the urgent need to join the masses: local color, it seems, and the great allegories of the Agrarian Reform, had since grown tiresome.

Also, now in the '90s, the solid generation of recently-arrived Cuban artists hasn't had much to say with regard to boom called neo-Mexicanism nor, for that matter, much to learn from it. Championed by Mexico City curators, who anthologized the symbolic and literary substrata of Mexican identity for American museums—including images of Frida Kahlo, the virgin of Guadalupe, bleeding hearts, and corn as the world's anthropological navel—this trend had nothing to offer young Cuban artists for whom even Cuban themes have never amounted to anything more than mere conceptualizations of a point of view.

Vanguard and Simulacrum: Havana in the '80s

An image of what Havana was like in '80s might help to explain why over 30 Cuban artists, between the ages of 25 and 35, are now living and working in Mexico.

It was in the '80s that the first generation of artists and intellectuals (born during the years of the revolution) began producing their works.

Theirs was a generation that had grown up without the records of Celia Cruz and without the novels of Severo Sarduy. It was a generation which, for political reasons, was kept ignorant of a whole brilliant gamut of Cuban culture. Nevertheless, while limited by these sectarian restraints, its members were also trained to be the most educated and professional generation in the entire history of the island. And so it was.

Curiously, the revolution had given these artists the sufficient intellectual background to surmount the cultural (and mental) limitations imposed by "the bearded men," while it also allowed them to free themselves from the burden of a neo-Colonial past: one of the great paradoxes—perhaps the most fortunate—of that Third World experiment called the Cuban revolution. The "Generation of the '80s," grew up reading Hermann Broch, Mishima, Roland Barthes and Marx; they were nourished on the films of Tarkovsky and John Casavettes while trying to get their hands on the latest catalog to shows by Cindy Sherman, Clemente, Kiefer, Mapplethorpe or Hans Haacke. . .Perpetually broke and always in debt, these young artists nonetheless traveled to the biennials in Paris, São Paulo, Venice or Kassel (making friends, no doubt, with whom to stay).

It seems that after marching in all the parades and memorizing all the hymns, these "Children of the Utopia" discovered that it wasn't particularly stimulating to be the "docile wage-workers of official thought."[2] So it was that in the early '80s, the State began to feel increasingly threatened by the critical discontent and the political distrust shared by the youngest members of the intelligentsia, whose obsession with turning Cuba's social reality into a truly liberating enterprise was to eventually disclose all the moral atrophy and the ideological inconsequence of a system based on simulacra, manipulation and inefficiency.

The arts suddenly became a battlefield. A case in point was the conference on "Art & Sex" held at the headquarters of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union (which revealed both the dramatic and critical authority of performance as a deconstructive genre.) While the pompous experts droned on and on, two young painters[3] abruptly stormed through the doors disguised as walking penises, and literally "penetrated" the room. In one gigantic orgasm, they squirted the stupefied public with milk: the Word was left raped by the Act. This performance also stressed that the estheticism imposed by the painting of the '80s had become a strategy that was too aristocratic to salvage Cuba's cultural continuity. It was clear that after the "dark" years of the '70s,[4] it was now necessary to dynamite the entire ideological platform which limited the role of art within Cuban society. Nothing better than performance to shatter all inertia.

Colloquiums—which had become so prevalent throughout the '80s—were now the privileged site for a performative intrusion on officialdom. The group known as Arte Calle[5] was especially important in this respect.

While its members were still students at the Academy, the group staged several remarkable performances. In one, members invaded a hall wearing gas masks and shouting parodies of the political slogans used in revolutionary rhetoric: "Give me Art or give me Death!" "Down with the critical contamination of art!" "Critics, beware, for we have nothing to fear from you!" *"¡Venceremos!"* At another happening, the same troupe, painted in gold, dove into the waters of Havana Bay—one of the most polluted in the world—while hurling flyers which read "Easy Shopping (Duty Free)" in protest against the government selling national patrimony to Spain—including, silver, antiques, paintings, jewelry—and against the discriminatory fever for the dollar. . .

A few months later, a short-lived exhibition featured a live sex-shop, as well as photographs of one of the artists masturbating, as if to draw an analogy between Cuban art and onanism. The bureaucracy, in a frenzy, began stirring the old ghost called "political risk." Art, on the other hand, had now shed its salon style to stimulate participation in the political process: not from an esthetic viewpoint, but from one directly taken to the streets.

But that wasn't all. At an exhibition entitled *"A tarro partido"*[6] ("Against All Odds"), one work showed the Cuban flag made out of pieces of meat. Another piece featured two large masses, in morbid concupiscence, copulating behind an effigy of Ché Guevara. . .The scandal became the talk of the town. It wasn't long, of course, before the officials arrived. And in their wake came thousands of lowbrows (who, after punching out their time cards at work, expect the art gallery to be a sort of Alka Seltzer), furiously scribbling in the guestbook to demand the suppression of that kind of filth. [The authorities wielded their right to preserve the decency of the area, and the exhibit was eventually moved elsewhere.]

Even those spaces through which the State thought its promising young talents could be "bought" eventually became sites of crushing criticism. At Havana's III Biennial, the most impressive piece belonged to a 24-year-old: a veritable Trojan horse of political propaganda.[7] The installation consisted of an imposing 10-meter barricade with heavy Stalinist overtones and illegible letters—Cyrillic? Sanskrit? Official rhetoric?—as well as countless medals, images and slogans. Heroic kitsch. The State opted to feign ignorance. (After all, pretending is a splendid game.)

By the late '80s, cultural institutions no longer knew how to confront the opportunism of Party dogmas without deadening the mental effervescence of its young artists. The State failed to understand that merciless criticism was the last resort in legitimizing the revolution as a continual process. Soon, the most backward ideological forces, led by Carlos Aldana, found the occasion to pull the rug out from under "liberalism" by politically

burying the Cultural Minister, Armando Hart, one of the key figures of the '80s.

The decade came to a close with a wave of censorship. The "Castillo de la Real Fuerza" (The Castle of the Royal Forces) had become the last creative bastion for Cuba's young iconoclasts. [In fact, few alternative spaces in Latin America can boast of having equalled the quality and dynamism of the exhibitions held within that year of the Castillo's existence.] It wasn't long, however, before the scandals began taking on increasingly absurd proportions. Each show managed to dynamite the two commonplaces of Cuban social life: sex and politics. One work, in a naïve style, served as the detonator: Fidel depicted in the main square addressing thousands of Fidel-replicants. The space was immediately closed down—and there was more to follow. Vice Minister Marcia Leiseca was removed from her post, "guilty" of promoting the young maudits internationally, and of offering them institutional support. Meanwhile, in the side wings, Minister Hart could almost see his beard go up in flames. In record time, the Castillo de la Real Fuerza became a quiet monument once again: today it houses the Ceramics Museum.

While everything seemed to topple along with the Berlin Wall, economic and political tensions in Cuba began to rise. Though the work of these young artists had increasingly become the model upon which to invent the ideological battles regarding future political survival, censorship paralyzed everything. State security began paying periodic "visits" to the studios of young artists and, by 1990, Cuban art found itself—and not without its fair share of sarcasm—in a state of withdrawal. Though general disenchantment began to undermine the utopian ideal, no intellectual figure of any significance emerged to legitimize the various opposition groups. And even with everything under control, one art student dared to defecate in the middle of an opening at Havana's Promotional Center for the Visual Arts. [The director was quickly dismissed and, for his performance, the student was awarded six months of room and board in prison.] Finally, at this crux in the country's cultural activity, gallery spaces and public halls were completely shut down—and the new officials managed to hide all the tracks. It wasn't long before art supplies and magazines became increasingly scarce. And no one could explain how galleries had mysteriously booked their schedules for the following year.

Mexican Visas

No one seems to agree about who came first. Cuban gigolos had already swarmed to Mexico, and so had movie extras, dancers, salsa musicians . . .In less than a year, though, more than thirty painters had also managed

to obtain letters of invitation to evade the inertia of what was now a sedentary island.

Mexico offered many advantages, besides the same language. Along with its tradition of welcoming exiled Latin American intellectuals, Mexico has always been considered a friendly country with more or less similar idiosyncrasies. Visas to Mexico were readily granted and the country showed signs of prosperous economic growth. . .and all at a distance of $190 U.S. dollars. For the artist, there were even additional incentives: the sheer visual force of Mexican culture, its postmodern syncretism, its immense cultural infrastructure, its pivotal relationship to the New York art market, as well as the chance to compete professionally, and to continue developing a mature body of work.

With new emigration laws in effect, Cuban authorities realized that there was no reason *not* to grant permits to the Young Turks, who would eventually cool off in another country. On the outside, they thought, the artists would inevitably collide with the cold reality of competition, venting their criticism from scratch—with little, if any, benefits. Two additional items: Mexico does not grant political asylum, and the Mexican press remains relatively loyal to the historical legitimacy of the Cuban revolution. Furthermore, functionaries at the Cuban Embassy in Mexico could "visit" the artists and attend their exhibitions; perhaps, on occasion, invite them to dinner. Business as usual.

Under the Volcano

Today, the heavyweights in contemporary Cuban art have scattered: Flavio Garciandía lives in Germany; Arturo Cuenca in New York; José Bedia and Consuelo Castañeda in Mexico. . .It was hardly a fate they had imagined for themselves: for in the mid-'80s, Havana had become the site of a cultural movement which questioned and contributed to the historical paths of Latin American art in general. As the generation to whom the future of Cuba had been promised, they had no other choice now but to turn their Utopia into a form of compromise, and their exile into a source of maturity.

Most of the artists came to Mexico[8]—even if little could be expected of the narrow-minded nationalism of the Mexican art market. It was Nina Menocal (a Cuban who emigrated as a child to Palm Beach and now lives in Mexico) whose passion made it possible—against the general paranoias on both the left and right—to open a gallery that would help these recently arrived Cuban artists who, as a first step, needed a space to show their work.

Indeed, thanks to Ninart[9] it is still possible today to speak of a contemporary Cuban avant-garde. Without ignoring its various limitations, the gallery has succeeded in re-centering the Cuban art movement of the

'80s. while, to a large degree, overcoming the handicap many of these artist have faced with regard to the market. The task has not been easy—particularly in Mexico. Most of these Cubans work with a solid conceptual footing so that the boldness of the work tended to disconcert the average collector. Nina Menocal could be very convincing. She had the elegance and, more importantly, the daring to impose a more (post)modern taste on collectors. The rest, of course, was thanks to the work itself.

Without any official backing and without the contacts, entering the Mexican art market can be traumatic—particularly if one is unprepared to make esthetic concessions. [Most of these Cuban artists have had to negotiate between their professional, if utopian, expectations and, as they see it, the role of art as one within a larger project of social justice—and as a phenomenon which modifies cultural standards of living, regardless of class.] With little under a year in Mexico, the work by these artists has already turned to other areas of exploration and is beginning to show signs of change. The most blatant shift is a timely "decontextualization" employed by those artists who had once turned the Cuban political "hen house" into a brilliant source of critical commentary, directing their work now toward more philosophical and less illustrative matters. Many artists have abandoned over-conceptualization in the work, as well as the use of ephemeral materials. The easel has gained prestige. With the client in mind, many have externalized the excellence of their technique and accepted commissioned works. While living in the "belly of the monster"[10] has made many of these Cubans more flexible with regard to their old ethical standards as "pure" artists, it has also revealed the benefits of the artistic training they were given.

In all truth, there is nothing really extraordinary about this "exile" beyond the personal continuity in the individual work and the obvious professional motivations. To date, however, aside from the well-attended exhibitions at Ninart, no established art gallery in Mexico has considered promoting any of these artists, or of offering them a group show. No national art magazine has published anything substantial on the Cuban avant-garde in Mexico. No official gesture has been made despite all the evidence of a solid artistic movement now a guest in this country.

For these Cuban artists, to work under the volcano—like hostages of their own personal utopias, at the margins of a hungry context—at least helps to define objectives. Anything and everything is possible. There are those who have given up art entirely to follow their wanderlust, and those who have managed to squeeze out a meager living on their work—period. Those who have made it into the Soho galleries or ads in *Art in America*, and those with bank accounts who successfully travel as guests from country to country. Those who finance their expensive art projects by painting portraits of society matrons, and those who know they won't last

very long on *tacos*. Those who eventually expect to adapt to the established Mexican market, those who expect a more intelligent attitude on the part of U.S. gallery owners and collectors. . .and those who—upon waking each day—simply wish they were painting in Havana.

Inside/Outside

An exhibition in Mexico City entitled "Fifteen Cuban Artists"[11] caused a commotion among Cuban authorities and Miami's most reactionary sectors. The exhibition's aim was to seek common points of expression between artists who developed in Cuba and those who developed in the United States, as well as to jointly initiate a restoration, beyond individual political projections and "the geographic and political ghettos into which Cuban culture is usually embedded, as the exclusive property of a specific agenda."[12] (That Cuban painters in Mexico have made an effort to include their counterparts in the United States suggests a number of cultural strategies for turning Mexico City into a site for negotiating the future restitution of a fragmented Cuban culture.)

Miami, of course, thrives on politics. As a result, many painters living in Florida immediately saw "the ghost of the Castro government" behind the proposal, and criticized the Cuban-American painters (Cruz Azaceta, César Trasovares and Felix González Torres) for having participated in the "manipulation." Likewise, the Cuban government sent the Cultural Vice Minister to Mexico to hinder what it considered "a Miami initiative" aimed at politically compromising the young artists. In a word: general paranoia.

"Fifteen Cuban Artists" was the first step towards a more extensive projected exhibition that would gather the Cuban avant-garde of the '80s and '90s, including first-rate contemporary artists working in Havana, Mexico, Madrid, Paris, New York. . .Paradoxically, to date, neither Havana nor Miami seems to have the necessary tolerance to stomach this kind of cultural encounter. As far as Cuba goes, it is no secret that the division "outside/inside" is also good business. A business for those who flourish on the dream of revenge. A business for those who survive on inefficiency. A business for South Beach galleries and a business for those amateurs, exiled in Miami, who have made painting "an honest way to make a living."

Those who oppose an encounter between artists from Cuba and Miami seem to defend a legitimacy that doesn't stem from the organic side of their cultural identity, but from a twisted relationship with Power. Politics is already wreaking havoc on the future of Cuba. While many artists on the outside expect *mea culpas*, those inside are busy inventing non-official pasts for themselves. Some Cuban painters recently on the Outside now are already declaring—falsely—that they were repressed by the State, or that

all their grants were in fact awarded by foreign governments. Hopefully, the future Cuban art market will keep from stooping to that kind of opportunism. For the time being, though, Cuban culture remains a hostage of small-town politics, blackmailed by the reasons of State.

Cuban artists in Mexico have one strong advantage—and it is hardly a moral one. No one seems to be buying their works. And as long as they can continue producing away from the centers of power, they just might get by without painting themselves into a corner.

—OSVALDO SANCHEZ

Notes

1. Today in Mexico, though the majority of young Cubans are visual artists, there are also a number of contemporary writers, classical dancers, actors and musicians.

2. A phrase from the essay "Socialism and Man in Cuba," in which Ché Guevara addressed the danger of dogmatizing intellectual thought within the revolution.

3. A happening conceived by Consuelo Castañeda, currently living in Mexico, and Humberto Castro, living in Paris.

4. The '70s—known as the "dark" decade, or "the hard years"—constituted a period of planned officialization as to Cuban cultural policy. These were the Brezhnev years, when culture began to be manipulated as a Party mise-en-scene, while many intellectuals and artists were convicted of homosexuality and liberalism during the trials at the close of the '60s, serving their sentences in silence.

5. A group of teenagers studying visual arts at the San Alejandro Academy. Its leader, the performance artist Aldito Menéndez, currently lives in Barcelona.

6. A show by painter Tomás Esson, currently living in Miami.

7. The work of artist Glexis Novoa, currently living in Mexico.

8. Among the most important artists of the '80s and '90s, the following currently work in Mexico: José Bedia, Consuelo Castañeda, Rogelio López-Marin, Leandro Soto, Rubén Torres-Llorca, Israel León, Gustavo Acosta, Carlos García, Carlos Cárdenas, Pedro Vizcaíno, Adriano Buergo, Ana Albertina, Alejandro Aguilera.

9. "Ninart: Centro de Cultura" was founded in part thanks to the initiative of Cuban conceptual artist Arturo Cuenca who, for the past year, has been living in New York City.

10. An allusion by José Martí to his period in U.S. exile.

11. This exhibition, as well as a proposed selection of Cuban painting in the '80s, both inside and outside Cuba, are joint projects between Nina Menocal and the author.

12. From the author's opening speech at "Fifteen Cuban Artists."

Here's a passage from Wake Forest's latest title in the 20th-century French poetry series, Jacques Dupin's SELECTED POEMS.

"Plus lourde d'être nue

ses vocalises meurtrieres
son rire au fond de mes os

notre buisson quotidien
les balafres de la lumière"

Paul Auster translates it as:

"Heavier when naked

her murderous voice exercises
her laughter in the core of my bone

our daily thicket
the slashes of light"

A simple and elegant solution—especially in the first line—but of the sort that seems to elude one of his colleagues in this volume, Stephen Romer (David Shapiro is the other) who translated Dupin's *Un Récit*. Since Dupin—at least as he's represented in this volume—is strongest when he exercises the brief lyric in the core of his bone, Auster might have abbreviated selections from *Un Récit* (and thus preclude translations like "the new ice-up" for "la nouvelle glaciation") and chosen more of his work from FITS AND STARTS (now out of print), or from a Dupin issue of CRONOPIOS (May, 1970—it is definitely unavailable) with some nice James Stephens pieces, and even one from Bly. In any event, this SELECTED Dupin, with the French *en face*, is worth having.

*

When Hugh Seidman's first book, COLLECTING EVIDENCE, was published in 1970, Oppen thanked him for the copy, but wrote "I feel the narrative structure as both a strength and a weakness. A technical strength but a weakness." I'd suggest that the narrative element in Seidman's work isn't merely a technical strength but the foundation of his mythopoeia. And

in his new collection, PEOPLE LIVE, THEY HAVE LIVES, his language is more discursive than BLOOD LORD or THRONE, FALCON, EYE, while the poetry itself is denser. In "1968-1969": "I parked at Laurie Cohen's shut house, at the Golden Gate/. . . .Now we are *N*years late." That's the Laurie to whom "Vallejo Street" is dedicated—and thus Seidman's recapitulation of his past (poetry and lovers) implicates itself and thereby reinforces the fiction.

Zukofsky, with whom Seidman studied, often wrote out of the trinity of his family; but since Seidman writes from the other side, as the son of two elderly parents, the optics are reversed, and the parents seem mighty large, even larger as they shrink into old age and death. Every presence in Seidman's work tends to increase; the lovers' stuffed bear in "Mr. Bear," the very strong poem this collection starts with, grows to the "Greatest dipper shining over the lovers." Moreover, Seidman is one of the few poets for whom New York figures as an actual city rather than a location the Mayor's Verse Office is keen on pushing.

*

The Poetry Society of America had to move their Laura Riding Evening to a smaller room when a divorce lawyer had a bigger party. That was the least of their problems. Some of the readings of Riding's work were quite good, but the personal tributes were somewhat sickening—maybe that's why some of the guests who had seats left them so quickly and headed for the other party. When MOMA sells-out Matisse they do it to pay the rent; what's the point of smarming a writer?

Kenneth Rexroth wrote in 1971: "I think the history of the last thirty years of American poetry would have been different had she been around." Of course, she was around (see SULFUR 10) until 1991, but for most "readers" the "cessation" has never been adequately answered (Rimbaud died before he was forced to explain his own), and so they suspect the answer's in RATIONAL MEANING, her book on language that's been ready for publication some twenty years. Once that's been published, and also maybe a large collection of magazine essays that address, however marginally, the particulars of her reasons for not writing poetry, and the universities have had their way with her, readers, and especially writers, will be able to read the work seriously—that is, to use and criticize it—without the distraction of peripheral matters

But first the work needs to be put in print, or back in print. Persea has just published a handsome edition of FIRST AWAKENINGS: THE EARLY POEMS OF LAURA RIDING. There's a lot of very good work here, some just as strong as what she saw fit to include in her first collection, THE CLOSE CHAPLET, but Riding requested that it be published separately and

not in a larger COMPLETE POEMS together with THE 1938 COLLECTED since she didn't see it as part of the official canon. Persea should then at least reissue THE 1938 COLLECTED in an edition that doesn't crumble in your hands.

Future Riding titles include reissues of SELECTED POEMS IN FIVE SETS (spring 1993) and THE TELLING (Fall 1993), and new books, THE WORD WOMAN (spring 1993), and FOUR UNPOSTED LETTERS TO CATHERINE (fall 1993).

—LIGERO SMITH

Keith Waldrop, Shipwreck in Haven. Windsor (Vermont): Awede, 1991.

The apostrophe that opens Keith Waldrop's new long poem specifies his formal purpose: to resist the context-mongering of conventional narrative, and to eliminate what Robert Frost called "leaving doors" (unvoiced autobiographical referents) in poems and draw a cleaner and presumably more honest demarcation between art and the world. "Balancing. Austere. Life- / less. I have tried to keep / context from claiming you," the speaker claims, referring to his effort to shed the seductions of context in favor of a poetry of formal clarity. In the first two sections Waldrop delineates his poetic world as a series of discrete tercets, each as clean as a haiku, yet motivated by a larger project defined by the tercets themselves. In the first section, the tercets group in fours, and the larger unit seems complete in itself while resisting the danger of absorbing the significance of the smaller unit by rendering four three-line units as one twelve-line unit. In the second section the tercets unfold without regard for each other, yet with an underlying sense of lost narrative, as if the speaker could, if he chose to inscribe his presence in the sequence, link these brief poems more securely. But the pleasures are individual, and the best of these tercets suggest—though with a slight air of parody— Pound's experiments in pure Imagism: "Stone floor in silver light, moon / playing also on the dancing rill. Stolen / sweets. Near the temple, overladen."

Waldrop would seem to have entered the search for pure poetry, a chimera of the poets of the nineties whom Pound gently parodied in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.* However, section four challenges that notion by

returning to the orderly arrangement in triplets, this time in groups of three, but enjambing them into brief narratives of indeterminate significance, as if the sense of story is stealing over the speaker. Waldrop reminds us that the world has a way of entering the poem in unexpected and absurd ways, as in the form, for example, of a "large brass candlestick, flung / against the banister." This sense of awakening to a world from which beauty has vanished represents the paradox of formal perfection in poetry: that though distilled from the language with which we represent the world, it cannot open doors to that world, cannot even extend the language into larger certainties, whether "on the main" or "along the coast."

Although section five attempts to resist the draw of narrative by dividing itself line by line into sentence fragments, phrases, half-promises, threats, it gives way to the frankly narrative flow of tercets in section six, in which the speaker acknowledges that both the candor and the fullness of his vision derive from the world rather than from art, and that art is something imposed on the world, not independent of it. Waldrop is, I suppose, a "poet's poet" because his concerns are primarily formal and aesthetic, rather than thematic. But no theme more deeply claims us than language, and Waldrop's generous and often startlingly euphonious delving into the issue of pure poetry and its uneasy relationship with narrative proves compelling.

—WILLIAM DORESKI

It seems to me fundamentally wrong that the first Caribbean Nobel Prize in Literature did not go to Aimé Césaire. This is not to knock the poetry of Derek Walcott who did receive the Prize, but to once again insist that there is a quantum leap between a body of work that is accomplished and a body of work that is unique. Thinking about this, I went back to André Breton's essay, "Un Grand Poète Noir," written in 1941, after Breton, visiting Martinique on his way to exile in America, discovered a section of "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" in Césaire's magazine, *Tropiques*. Breton's words ring absolutely true to me in 1993, and I quote a paragraph here as a modest testimony to Aimé Césaire, now entering his 80th year:

> The next day I met Césaire. I recapture my first immediate reaction at finding him so purely black—a blackness that his smile kept away from you at first sight. I already knew and felt, as will be confirmed later on, that through him the human furnace was blazing to its climax where knowledge of the highest order mingled with magical gifts. For me, his emergence—I don't mean only on that particular day when I met him as a flesh-and-blood individual—takes on a value of a *sign of our times.* Thus, in a lone challenge of an age when the mind seems to renounce its rights, when nothing would appear to be done any longer except for the purpose of crowning the triumph of death, when art itself is on the verge of being stultified in obsolete forms and values, the first new breath of life that can give us back our trust and vigour comes from a black poet. A black man it is who masters the French language as no white man can today. A black man it is who guides us today through unexplored lands building as he goes the contacts that will make us progress on sparks. A black man it is who embodies not simply the black race but all mankind, its queries and anxieties, its hopes and ecstasies and who will remain for me the symbol of dignity.
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> (Tr. by Emile Snyder)

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Readers of *Caterpillar* may remember #15/16 in which 80 pages of the poetry of Stephen Jonas (1921-1970) appeared. Jonas is still not well-known, so it is a pleasure to notice that Joseph Torra's fine magazine, *lift*, has done a double issue (#10 & 11), on Jonas's poetry, with responses by Gerrit Lansing, Cid Corman, John Wieners, David Rattray, and Raffael de Gruttola among others. This issue is $9, and can be ordered at: 10-Rear Oxford Street, Somerville MA, 02143.

*

The Horse has Six Legs (An Anthology of Serbian Poetry), edited and translated by Charles Simic, Greywolf. Over 100 poems by 20th-century Serbian poets, among whom Momcilo Nastasijevic, Rade Drainac, Vasko Popa, Ljubomir Simovic, and Aleksandar Ristovic appear outstanding. The jewel of the book is Popa's Little Box series. Oddly, there is no sense of a political landscape, no writing that would seem to prefigure the present Yugoslavian catastrophe.

*

Evening Train is Denise Levertov's best collection of poems since the early '70s, and its publication (by New Directions) is accompanied by her *New & Selected Essays*, which includes a fascinating and moving essay on her relationship with Robert Duncan. Levertov has now assimilated Williams and Rilke so thoroughly that her poetic lines move with a flexibility and openness rare in any poetry.

*

Peter Quartermain's *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge) will be reviewed in *Sulfur* #33 by Keith Tuma. I mention it here as the chapter on Bunting sent me back to Bunting's *Collected Poems*, and when I opened the book, a little postcard, published by the Basil Bunting Poetry Archive, 1990, fell out. I am sure the Archive will not mind if I quote the contents (Bunting's advice to student poets in Newcastle, in the early 1970s):

I SUGGEST

1. Compose aloud; poetry is a sound.
2. Vary rhythm enough to stir the emotion you want but not so as to lose impetus.
3. Use spoken words and syntax.
4. Fear adjectives; they bleed nouns. Hate the passive.
5. Jettison ornament gaily but keep shape.

Put your poem away till you forget it, then:

6. Cut out every word you dare.
7. Do it again a week later, and again.

Never explain—your reader is as smart as you.

*

In 1991 Jahbone Press in Los Angeles published *Lee Sr Falls to the Floor* by Leland Hickman. Unfortunately, there is no accompanying information as to whether this is the rest of Lee's poetry (before and after *Great Slave Lake Suite*, Momentum, 1980)—and if it is, I am astonished, as Lee often referred to a long work-in-progress, "Tiresias," of which *GSLS* is identified as only "I:9:B" (that is, where is I: 8? I:9:A?). To further confuse matters, six of the twelve "elements" in *GSLS* are reprinted in the Jahbone book, without their dedications. As some *Sulfur* readers know, Hickman more or less stopped writing poetry while editing the 10 issues of *Temblor*, surely one of the most magnificent one-man efforts in literary magazine editing. But

previous to *Temblor*, I am under the impression that Lee worked for years on "Tiresias," and if the working papers are still existent, I suspect they would be very interesting to see.

*

For Henry Miller fans, a really first-rate collection of essays has recently been published: *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*, edited by Ronald Gottesman (GK Hall & Co.). Along with fairly-well known pieces by Mailer, Rexroth, Lawrence Durrell's letter on receiving *Tropic of Cancer*, Kate Millet and Jay Martin, there is a previously-unpublished review of *Cancer* by Ezra Pound, a poem to Miller by William Carlos Williams (published in a limited 1945 Bern Porter edition), and an engaging tribute by Robert Creeley. From a letter by Isaac Bashevis Singer to Bertrand Mathieu: "Although I don't write in his style, I cherish him as a writer and as a friend of everything which is genuine in the art of writing."

*

I have only written three book jacket blurbs in my life—for Blackburn's *Collected Poems*, Rothenberg's *Khurbn*, and most recently, Karen Kelly's *Her Angel* (Singing Horse Press), which for my money is the most exciting first book in some time. This is the beginning of a kind of poetry N.O. Brown was arguing for in his masterpiece, *Love's Body*.

*

Over the past few years, I have collected some half dozen books on the Mexican *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead), in which the dead are welcomed in homes and cemeteries, with various foods and offerings, end of October/beginning of November. My hunch is that this is one of the oldest human festivals, with roots in early Neolithic agrarian culture, in which revenants are appeased as well as greeted, at the crest of harvest. The Mexican version is layered with pre-Columbian, and colonial imagery, much of which comes from the European medieval preoccupation with skulls and skeletons. Among the books on the subject I have found, most of which are mainly collections of photographs, one is quite serious and thorough: *The Skeleton at the Feast*, by Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayers (Texas). It sensitively includes a number of interviews with artists and craft-workers whose altars, sugar skulls, sugar paste animals, candelabra, and papercuts etc., are among the finest made in present-day Mexico. This past fall, Caryl Eshleman and I spent a week in Oaxaca over the Day of the Dead period. As might be expected, American Halloween, with its plastic and rubber low quality goods, has invaded the traditional stalls in the markets.

*

Nancy Peters, the editor of City Lights Books, should be congratulated for her editing of the "War After War" issue of *City Lights Review* (#5). Excellent pieces on the so-called Gulf "War" by Chomsky, Boal, Lamborn Wilson, Solomon, Indiana, Huston, Lubin, and Blankfort. Of the books I have read on what Chomsky refers to as "international terrorism on a colossal scale," Jean Edward Smith's *George Bush's War* (Holt) is the best. Besides being an excellent chronicle of Bush's deft manipulation of other nations under obligation to us, Congress, and the media, the book is a meditation on the dangers of arbitrary executive power. I also recommend Stephen Brockman's "The Cultural Meaning of the Gulf War," in the spring 1992 issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Of related horror is *Four Hours in My Lai* by Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim (Viking), "the fullest account ever published of the most infamous war crime in American military history."

*

As a kind of vast, ontological update on Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jeremy Rifkin's *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture* (Dutton) contains information that pervades many aspects of current planetary ecological peril. From Mithraic myth:

> From the bull's body sprang all the plants and herbs that men now find useful. From the spinal cord sprang wheat, the staff of man's life, from the blood came the grape vine and wine, the sacred joy of life.

From the first official description of the devil (447 AD):

> a large black monstrous apparition with horns on his head, cloven hoofs—or one cloven hoof—ass's ears, hair, claws, fiery eyes, terrible teeth, an immense phallus, and a sulphurous smell.

From a contemporary description of a slaughterhouse workstation:

> The kill floor looks like a red sea. . . .warm blood bubbles and coagulates in an ankle deep pool. The smell sears the nostrils. Men stand in gore. . . .each night the gooey mess is wiped away. . . .

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Art Brut and the Museological Impasse

These considerations on the continued marginalization of Art Brut (Outsider Art) are motivated by the 1992 exhibition and catalogue, *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, originating at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.* Though numerous shows of Art Brut have been organized in small American venues (notably exhibitions of Ramirez, Wölfli, and the Gugging artists at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia), *Parallel Visions* marks the first time that Art Brut has been the subject of a major American museum show. Yet it should be noted that these works entered the museum on the coattails of those modernist artists who have expressed interest and passion in such marginalized aesthetic productions. The organization logic of this exhibition was such that only those works of Art Brut which are known to have influenced a modern artist were included in the show. Perhaps, as has often been explained to me, this is still, given the current art historical climate, the only way to get Art Brut into the Museum. Nevertheless, the implications of such limitations are evident. In any case, the purpose of this present note is to briefly indicate some of the aporias, misunderstandings, prejudices and vested interests at the source of this continued exclusion. The issues may be schematized as follows.

Polemic / theory. One of the key sources of confusion and error in contemporary theoretical discourses in the arts and humanities is the widespread and egregious refusal to separate the polemical function of any given discourse from its theoretical signification. The politicization of art and theory often necessitates a militancy which polarizes the aesthetic field, occasionally establishing inopportune anachronisms and exclusions. This is, *a fortiori*, the case with current appropriations of, as well as with dissent against, Dubuffet's writings on Art Brut. Dubuffet's hyperbolic polemic—originating in the cultural context of 1940s Paris—was motivated by the general cultural refusal to consider the works of schizophrenics, eccentrics, spiritualists, the isolated, and other marginalized groups as constituting art. Dubuffet aimed at legitimizing a previously suppressed domain, all the while appropriating these idiosyncratic discoveries for his own painterly ends. These practical goals must not be confused with the critical and theoretical aspects of his thought. To put it in the crudest terms of aesthetic Realpolitik, discursive preconditions of exhibition are very different from conditions of appreciation and understanding. Unfortunately, Dubuffet's

*My own recent work on the subject includes *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (State University of New York Press, 1992), as well as a contribution on "obsession" to the *Parallel Visions* catalogue.

polemic has been proffered as theory by both his detractors *and* supporters. On the part of his supporters, an attempt to maintain the aesthetic excitement of the originary moment of discovery, of the inauguration of the domain, has resulted in an anachronistic polemical discourse passing for the central theoretical position. This exuberation—often tinged with a romanticized nostalgia for creative "purity"—has, in varying degrees and in different manners, beset most of Dubuffet's immediate successors.

Heterogeneity / homogeneity. The problem of categorization is germane to the difficulties of dealing with Art Brut, since it is defined as art with minimal connection to the cultural realm. (The term itself is a misnomer, as the "brut" or raw are only occasional characteristics: such works are often, to the contrary, highly sophisticated and delicate. And the term "Outsider Art" is in a sense even more unfortunate: there are contemporary "outsiders," notably the homeless, who produce art which is quite traditional and thus has nothing to do with Art Brut.) Neither term must be grasped as a descriptive or categorical sign. Even beyond the usual reductivism of most "isms," the notion of Art Brut is too vast to serve any useful theoretical function: it denotes a highly heterogeneous field, defined by historical exclusions which produce true aesthetic ideolects. Born from polemic and passion, the term Art Brut must be analyzed before it is theorized; and all consequent theorization must be based upon the local distinctions of the different modes of artistic production which it delineates.

Art / symptom. Before Dubuffet, the main sub-category of what came to be called Art Brut to be taken seriously as art consisted of the drawings of schizophrenics. Most of the major early texts on the topic were written by psychiatrists, notably Morgenthaler's monograph on Wölfli (Bern and Leipzig, 1921), and Prinzhorn's classic *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (Berlin, 1922). Thus the foundational intellectual context of such art was the discourse of psychopathological symptomatology, rather than art history. This has certainly stigmatized Art Brut to a certain extent, both insofar as it consequently escapes art historical contexts, and especially because claims of mental illness in themselves still tend to be intrinsically vilifying. (Note that only about half of what falls under the category of Art Brut consists of art of the mentally ill.) The difficulty is that while psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psycholinguistics have much to reveal about the existential origins of such art (indeed, of all art), these disciplines tend to seriously devitalize aesthetic values. Furthermore, medical discourse cannot even begin to attempt the reconstitution of aesthetic theory necessitated by considerations of Art Brut.

Art Brut / Folk Art. In Europe, the history of Art Brut began in relation to the great early psychiatric hospital collections of drawings. Thus the central paradigm of Art Brut was that of the art of schizophrenics, which had its own, albeit aesthetically limited, metapsychological discourse. The

fact that contemporary academic theoretical discourse has a major psychoanalytic component resulted in the notion of Art Brut being common intellectual currency in Europe—even if the works themselves are for the most part neglected. In the USA the situation is far more difficult, as the central paradigm is differently nuanced. Here, Outsider Art has tended to be appropriated by the Folk Art establishment. This for the most part untheorized realm is quite out of vogue with academic aesthetic theory, hence part of the neglect of Art Brut. (Indeed, the situation is so extreme that drawings by one of the greatest American Outsider artists, Henry Darger, have been literally disintegrating from neglect and lack of museum interest.)

Museography / inaccessibility. Practical considerations also militated against the dissemination of Art Brut. Dubuffet's collection was transformed into the Collection de l'Art Brut at Lausanne, under the condition that the works not be loaned. Thus many of the major works in the field could only be consulted in Lausanne, which is not one of the art capitals of the world. Furthermore, the important hospital collections, such as the Prinzhorn collection in Heidelberg, are not open for general public consultation. Though the situation is changing in Europe (note, for example, the existence of L'Aracine, a museum of Art Brut at Neuilly-sur-Marne near Paris), the USA still has no public collection of Art Brut, though several dedicated galleries exist. It would be hoped that the ecumenical aesthetic pretensions of the postmodern discourse would finally provide a discursive (and exhibition) space for such marginalized works.

Quality / quantity. Needless to say, since by definition Art Brut is produced without conscious consideration of or engagement with mainstream artistic traditions, the criteria for determining the "quality" of Art Brut are different from those of the other, "cultural" arts. This is certainly the most difficult contemporary issue in the field. As is the case with tribal arts, for example, Art Brut is constituted according to symbolic systems radically different from those of the Western bourgeois cultural spheres. This necessitates diversified hermeneutic mechanisms, ones attuned to subtle ethnographic and sociological considerations. As is the case for many tribal cultures—as well as, *mutatis mutandis*, for schizophrenia—there is often operative a symbolic defence mechanism, either recalcitrant to or outrightly exclusionary of external influence, interference, and entry.

This in turn raises quantitative difficulties, threatening the various aesthetic hegemonies which would be menaced by the inclusion of Art Brut in the Western canon. Not only is Art Brut itself neglected by art historians, but its influence on modern art has (until the current LACMA show) been almost consistently dissimulated. The flood of new and strange works would necessitate the realignment of critical, theoretical and museological hierarchies, which would threaten an already unstable market based on

scarcity and on "quality" defined in relation to the position of any given work within the "tradition."

We can only remain dismayed, if not completely pessimistic, about the inherent "anxiety of influence" at work here, resistant to the intrinsically populist—even if highly circumscribed and bizarre—category of Art Brut.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Hank Lazer, *Doublespace:* Poems 1971–1989 (Segue, 1992)

In *Doublespace*, Hank Lazer seeks to reconcile the autobiographical free verse lyric and Language writing, typically seen as incompatible, by creating a kind of third space, "a song / and a law calling to each other across / a canyon voices interweaving and / separating dialog of whale song & propeller." *Doublespace* gives us two poetries, two books that meet in the middle (the second written right to left, like Hebrew). Book 1 comprises a personal and familial history in the dominant late seventies and eighties lyric mode. Book 2 is more language- centered than self-centered, a writing that disperses self and voice, that works by an "ongoing barrage of breaks" among multiple rhetorics. Yet Lazer remains aware that the self conceived in purely (inter)textual terms is as impoverished as the self of the workshop lyric. One tutelary spirit of Book 2 is Thoreau, and its polyvocal weave becomes a way to dramatize the knotty nature of quite Thoreauvian questions: how "to live attentively" and keep / in mind a train of thought a love of being."

The autobiographical lyrics of Book 1 employ a spare, largely nonfigurative rhetoric that sometimes slides from the understated into the merely prosaic. Daily moments often come charged with feeling and meaning (as in the heart-wrenching "1463 Hanchett Avenue"), but elsewhere they just stay mundane. Despite the unobtrusively supple syntax and the discipline of his pared-down style, then, the possibilities of this "late twentieth century take it on the chin / style" seem limited.

Book 2 is much broader in range. Of its three sequences, "Law-Poems" splices sections of the Alabama legal code with other sources and with Lazer's "own" words to explore, among other themes, how language constitutes self; "Compositions" uses numerical procedures to endow an

experimental poetics with some of the spiritual heft of Hebrew textual commentary ("i am number saith the Lord"); and the more visually porous, Howe-influenced "Placements" moves by a different kind of proceduralism, one defined by phrasal length and visual lay-out. Prosodically the poems of Book 2 are livelier, working with a more fractured but more exploratory syntax. And in the postmodern collage tradition, they manage striking shifts of tone as they draw their language(s) from diverse sources, "high" and "low": cheap biographies, weed killer labels, TV advertising and game shows, real estate, elementary school texts, *Walden*, dime store romances, Westerns, pop songs, skewed aphorisms, allusions from Hardy to Bernstein, from Whitman to Jabès, all this mixed with lyric passages in the mode of Book 1.

At certain points in Book 2 I find the aural play a little too cute, and the sequences too repetitive of a basic principle; at these points the idea can seem more interesting than its execution. But at their free-ranging, associative, witty, and tender best, the sequences expose the limitations of the autobiographical mode, at least as it's currently practised in American poetry. Paradoxically, then, the success of Book 2 draws the success of the whole, the sought-for creation of the double space, into question. In *Doublespace* a language-centered writing seems more able to assimilate autobiography than vice versa. But both modes can explore, to adapt Rachel Blau DuPlessis' crucial question, "what realism is made of," and the ongoing effort to construct that double space can only enrich our poetry.

—ALAN GOLDING

XUL [sül] is one of several small poetry magazines that sprang up in Argentina during the middle years of the last military dictatorship, which began when a military junta seized power in 1976 and ended, after a systematic repression that became known as the "Dirty War," in 1983. Those years also saw the disastrous Falklands War and a confusing succession of generals as President. Responding to the conditions of its time, in which any form of expression was potentially dangerous, when an estimated 30,000 "disappeared," often denounced by a neighbor or colleague, *XUL* (with an average circulation of 750) used its very marginality to affirm its relevance to the political realities it was born into.

It's easier for poetry to elude censorship, suggests Jorge Santiago Perednik, editor of *XUL* in the prologue to his anthology *Nuevo Verso Argentino: durante la dictadura* (1989), because of its potential for questioning the apparent transparency of language and meaning. "Readers. . .acquire a certain dexterity in reading between the lines, in searching for other meanings besides the obvious ones: they become *lectores habiles.*" Hiding specific allusions to the repression that readers decode or rendering conventional orders ambiguous: the editorial to *XUL* No. 7, June 1985, Poetic Campaign to the Desert, says, "El desierto es lo que no es cierto" ("The desert is that which is not certain"—"desierto" sounds like "de-cierto," another way of saying not certain); the territory where convention is put into question is approached through language, through a pun that reads as a tautology, creating a hole in logic that can be slipped through.

Susana Cerdá, in "Patrimonies 1981," her long poem in nine sections from the same number, defines this territory: "Between Victory and Defeat, categories proliferated, through which One/roved at ease, shouting for her: Freedom." In this response to the Falklands War the rules of an authoritarian language are used to subvert authority:

> If it is by mathematics, for mathematics, from a mathematics,
> [that: I love you.
> If it is by love, for a love, from a love, that: mathematics.

Cerdá's attention to the microdynamics of syntax is one way of opening up the space between victory and defeat. The syntactical progression of a sentence and sexual desire whose object is always unattainable carry out the same motion of perpetual displacement:

> After:
> (the past provoked by the verb, linked with the preposition:
> the only plural position that ends in preparing the place.
> Place of delight where one persistently searches for: EXIT.
> Eruption, disruption, a tear, evacuation.
> We have. We are being, have been thrown toward another.
> Place.)

Cerdá is especially attuned to the ambiguities of the compound verb—to the threatened independence of its constituent parts ("We have"; "we are being") and to the relationship between possessing ("having") and acting or being acted upon.

The possible confusion of being and having created by auxiliary verbs is even stronger in another long poem, "Don't Return" (*XUL* No. 5, April

1983), where Cerdá weaves permutations of phrases from the Argentine national anthem into a lyric treatment of the Shoklender parricide, a sensational 1981 murder case (see *Sulfur* 31, "The Shock of the Lenders" by Jorge Santiago Perednik). *Haber*, which serves as the auxiliary in the past perfect tense, is also the verb used to express existence: "There are." This confusion challenges the lyric's traditional concern with being, ending with a babble of broken auxiliary parts. "We won it, father./ We/ won it/ father,/ or we will./ Hadding had/ having/ if it has/ Hah!/ How much it costs for the Splendor/ to shine." The sacred idea of Being is complicit with capitalism—it costs—and patriotism— as the national anthem says, "May they be eternal/ the laurels [of independence] that we won/ let us live crowned with glory/or swear to die with glory." Independence clearly needs to be rethought.

The introductory comment to *XUL* No. 5 describes the participating poets as collaborating in "the transformation of the uses and customs of the dominant lyric." The full title of the magazine is *XUL signo viejo y nuevo*, "for that duality implicit in the sign between tradition and rupture, between institution and rebellion, the sign that constitutes at the same time a barrier and the last point reached, a limit beyond which only silence exists" (from the editorial to *XUL* No. 1, October 1980). The *XUL* poets saw their interrogation of the sign as a way to engage with what Charles Bernstein has called "the politics of language." Responding in part to a contemporary Argentine movement of New Romanticism in which it saw an unproductive retreat to tradition, *XUL* sought to "look back in order to continue along new paths," taking its name from Argentine surrealist Xul Solar, and featuring articles on a diverse selection of Argentine and world avant-garde figures and movements such as Oliverio Girondo and concrete poetry (especially the Brazilian Noigandres group).

Typographic innovation that read the concretists through the filter of poststructuralist linguistics became a feature of many poets who regularly published in *XUL*, including Susana Poujol, Roberto Cignoni, Roberto Ferro, Nahuel Santana, Emeterio Cerro, and Jorge Lépore. In his essay "A Possible Poetics" from *XUL* No. 3, December 1981, Ferro describes a concrete poetic practice privileging the signifier as visual object and as discourse at the same time, thus "reconstruct[ing] the circuit that imposes preestablished significations."

Lépore's series "Ifuelofnoforceps" from *XUL* No. 7 uses graphic space as structural agent to challenge linear reading. It sets strips of white with printed words on a solid black background: single letters running in a vertical line, placed right side up or sideways on the page; or boxes of letters with no word breaks which seem to offer the possibility of being read either horizontally or vertically. Phonetic spelling and linking adjacent words through a common consonant or vowel also help to create a kind

of parataxis that functions at a typographic as well as a syntactical level. Number 2 in the series depicts an endless stream of language cut into boxes, limited arbitrarily, held in check:

"archiveboxestreasureportablecellsofthelibidonightmaregivesprophylacticmargins."

The white boxes filled with text are another instance of

"portablecellsofthelibidonightmare."

I find that the translation process foregrounds the question of intentionality implicit in this work. Language produces its own word salad, adjacent letters sometimes emerging into unplanned word combinations: "verbalovernoverheating" containing "verbal," "lover," "over and over," "overheating";

"collectivemarkedjerkoffdoseofunxpectedmenses"

containing "of fun" as well as "of unexpected menses." Language intends itself, and I as translator, and therefore the original author as well, are just its midwives (or analysts).

The schizophrenic is fueled by love (Ifuelof = If you love) that becomes an obsessive "libidonightmare" in the context of a society that believes it can cure itself by repressing its own painful contradictions. "Ifuelofnoforceps 2" begins,

"explodedstimulinthisnecrophilicemergency":

the necrophilic emergency is, among other things, the historical post-dictatorship moment in which the country examines its own recent mutilated dead in exhaustive detail, documenting the military's atrocities—becoming obsessed with corpses in a belated effort to understand itself. Language almost becomes another uncontrollable bodily discharge like menstruation or ejaculation, a form of resistance to the regulation of one's body, mind, and desire by a highly repressive military industrial complex.

"*XUL*'s engagement with reality is contained in its engagement with language; one of the ways of realizing that engagement is in trying to make legible the use of language in the service of coercion and concealment" (from the editorial to *XUL* No. 4, August 1982). Jorge Santiago Perednik's book-length poem based on the Shoklender parricide case, "The Shock of the Lenders," is composed of a series of fragments. The language, like the speech of an interrogation victim, has been broken by oppressive demands. "Something's stopp. . ./:a link in the chain has been broke." A

narrow causal logic of patriarchal succession can no longer form the basis for meaning.

> or better: Truth is tails Beauty heads
> both faces the being—duplicity—coin of this cosmos
> the man who relates the eye and the finger
> the name that relates flash and bang
> what's more important, thunder or lightning?
> Great balls of fire, I thought you'd never say it!
> (from "Main Fragment")

The associative chain between "lightning" and "great balls of fire" is a threshold onto a clean slate or new beginning. Maybe. Or is new life possible? How can we speak, or be, under these conditions? Can we tell stories without endlessly repeating the same oppressive story? Can we not tell them and remain human? "To break the record to crack the memory for good to cut/ The evanescent knots that impede the conclusion": to do away with memory and structure is to destroy, perhaps to leave broken, like a torture victim. The poem yearns for, and fears, an end—sick of the patriarchal order's "perpetual beginning," perpetual desiring. It asks, What happens after the end (or goal) is reached? In the two "Diary of the Flight" fragments that close "The Shock of the Lenders," the young fugitive, or victim, or poet, is running away from or toward his end:

> . . .Friday the twenty-fifth
> I have to keep going *(I can keep going)*
> a slow trot:
> . . .somehow I get to the threshold
> onto my story *(maybe I've arrived at my story)*
> Saturday the twenty-sixth
> I have to keep
> the door that opens onto my story
> Sunday the twenty-seventh
> I'd be surprised if it opened

XUL has just put out a new issue on translation, its first since 1985. An issue on visual poetry is projected for April 1993. The magazine, Perednik says in *Nuevo Verso Argentino*, has always refused to be "the mouthpiece of a group, movement, or poetics"; the poets who have published there have forged a diverse, politically and formally engaged body of work that continues to evolve, and that is only beginning to reach an English-speaking public. Contemporary North American poets are still largely unknown and untranslated in Latin America (Charles Bernstein is now

being translated into Spanish for the first time by Argentine Ernesto Livon Grosman). The mutual time lag in poetic translation between the United States and Latin America should be redressed—we have much to say to each other.*

—MOLLY WEIGEL

*Many thanks to John Shoptaw, Janet Gray, and Ernesto Livon Grosman for insights and suggestions.

David Mus, *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* (Ulysse Fin de Siecle, 1991)

For decades David Mus has been living the life of an American expatriate scholar in France: reading and writing books of poetry and critical literary history; with the recent publication of *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* and also *Wall to Wall Speaks* (Princeton University Press, 1988), both books of poetry, as well as publication of *Le Sonneur de cloches* (1991, Editions Champ Vallon), a book of poetics, and with the reissue of his award-winning study *La Poetique de Francois Villon* (1976, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris; 1992, Editions Champ Villon), at last some attention from his cross-cultural allies ought to be paid this remarkable, strategic writer.

In more ways than one, *D'un Accord/Double Stopping* articulates an adventure of spirit. To begin with a digression appropriate to the mode, the reader of Mus' book-length poem will note much raveling there. Meaning both "to make" and "to unmake," "ravel" is a paradoxical sign, which is why Penelope employed it to elude her would-be ensnarers. And which is why both in theme and form, *D'un Accord* reconceives some of the logic of adventure rendered familiar through the *Odyssey*. In the logic of adventure, shipwreck is as integral to finding one's way home as it is to having foundered in that pursuit, as the raft Odysseus sailed from Calypso's island proves: destroyed by the natural force of wind, the group of rafters itself splinters finally—raveled, in the etymological destiny of the word (from "loose thread" which is akin to "rafter")—leaving Odysseus to attain the next stage of his adventure.

Again, in both theme and form, *D'un Accord* performs an act of raveling. In the course of this bilingual text the adventure of breath moves

through alternating passages of tercets and paragraphs—the tercets in hexameter dramatizing poetical, heroic aspiration, the paragraphs mediating more mundanely between respiration (actual wind and breath) and inspiration (quoting literature or enacting the actual artifice of it) as the poet writes in his study, or flees from his study—this alternation of mode continuing until midway through the book, where a long passage of attenuated, breathy lines drives the poem to its (alternative) endings. These modes of aspiration and respiration, assumed to be wind-driven,—

> of the breath, two faced, methodically without plan
> explored through both seasons and weathers, either
> noon or night, at the usual fall of wind
>
> grasping, between wind and outside, silence within, the gap
> forcing heaves onward the light-weight bluster whose
> back and forth rocking records far off the other's,
>
> . . . .
>
> du souffle a double face, irreflechi et methodique,
> que j'explore par tous temps, autant sous le regime
> des deux chutes journalieres du vent, qu'entre vent
>
> au dehors et silence, dedans, haletant, l'ecart
> remet en braude, ce peu de consequence ebruite
> qui enregistre au loin dans son balancement l'autre,
>
> . . . .

—destabilizes the poetic situation. Meanwhile, the poetic strategy of self-reflexivity becomes pronounced at the halfway point in this tale of linguistic adventure and reversal, reversing, that is, the bilingual relation of facing pages (as in an English-French / French-English dictionary), albeit in lexical non-equivalence:

> soufflerie bipede, aban ancre, haletant,
> au soupir pivot,
>
> l'oubli respiratoire, qui bruit, couine aet susurre
> dans sa cage ousseuse,
>
> boudon thoracique, soudure, ultime infantile
> vestige marin,

clameur voilee, la retenue, sourdine ou
reprise, epique, a bout,

de force, abusant d'air, comme passants, chasses,
par la rue, du vent.

staggered breath, panting heaves a pivotal
pause, anchors to

the respiratory lapse that burbles, sough, trills
in its bone cage,

thoracic drone, infantile link and very last
vestige of sea,

the muffled clamour, held in, breaks on this mute
refrain, epic, ending,

perforce, by abusing air, as passers-by thrust
down the street, wind.

The heroic sentences, splintered, are remaindered in an unvoiced space, the space of the page. The implicit question asked by David Mus is: what poetics can best represent the inheritance of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarme? The explicit answer: the linguistic adventure that leaves a spiritual quest afloat with relics of absence. (For the full answer, *Le Sonneur de Cloches,* Mus' volume of poetics, is the book to read.) A devoted translator of Andre du Bouchet, Mus believes that this poet had already drawn the crucial lessons to be learned from their symbolist renunciations by mid-century, and that he still provides a touchstone for certain kinds of incertitude and incommensurate states of being. The vicissitudes of breath across the material absence of the page is Mus' calculated response to modern implications of archaic perplexity, and if in his own poetry du Bouchet tends to rock back and forth among sensible antimonies in a structuralist grammar, Mus favors concentration on a single element susceptible to the display of expressive and timbral scope. The assault of the body of the poem (and the body as it moves through the poem) is violently multitudinous and similarly communicates multiple strata of intention. Mus' allegorical augmentation of that decay, fast-forwarding with cultural overload, brings futurist impulse to late romantic sorrow. An operatic raveling results.

*

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Drafts 3–14* (Potes & Poets Press, Elmwood, Connecticut, 1991)

Whereas Symbolism and its discontents well provide a stylistic foundation for the poetry of David Mus, Objectivism in all its material disarray charges the poetry of Rachel Blau DuPlessis. A theoretical hinge between their two poetries is the concretely indicated idea of breath. Utterances buffeted by circumstances, yet primarily by brooding over the state of literature that has become the author's circumstance is what one sees played out in Mus's work. A draft—draft as the voiced objective foregrounding of writing, as pertaining to the contingent nature of the writing process giving voice to breath—is what one reads in the scroll of DuPlessis' text.

As William Carlos Williams urges in DuPlessis' epigraph to her long piece "X: Letters," the Objectivist alphabet reflects the settlement of keys under the typing fingers of the poet, and as such "QWERTY. . ." is manifestly a writerly metier.

As with the Gospels, or, for that matter, the nursery rhyme, each privileged letter in this typographic alphabet assumes the function of a rubric and topos: a rubric that generates language and a topos that generates thought, initiating at the very least a certain ready cognitive skill. Taken together, "X: Letters" is committed to completely exercising each letter in this alphabet, and you can be sure that DuPlessis' recitation transgresses the sing-song consistency associated with the tedium of rote practice as it surmounts even the pleasures of repetition enjoyed in childhood games designed for learning. As against memorization, *memory* leaps erratically throughout:

> Y
>
> Yet every word is a plot:
> so story, a story
> why not tell a story, travelling yare and tidy.
>
> Two years or whatever
> to the day
> by some coincidence
> There's mesh netting
> yoked to the cliffs
>
> . . .

Encyclopedic by structural implication rather than through a thoroughgoing display of knowledge, this poem envisions a formalist scheme for time entailed in the experienced particularity of place. "Yet" becomes "net," as it well might, in the Objectivist's aesthetics of conviction.

The opening poem in the book announces the material investigation of the draft as preliminary sketch. A long passage of phrases bracketed in the copy-editor's margin and marked "cut," brands the poem with a device indicating "draft" and with the literariness of the author as critical reader of the poetic text. What DuPlessis has hereby excised is metaphor, muscled, if not muscle-bound, in imagist intensity, in order to leave the word "of" starting the poem in mid-sentence, and so *in medias res*. Revealed by degrees is a deceptively modest yet entirely profound grasp of the concept, Of. Author of *The Pink Guitar,* among other books, and editor of *The Selected Letters of George Oppen,* DuPlessis lacks no experience writing complete sentences, the putative form of male authority. But noteworthy in *Drafts* is that the dismantled proposition, the mythos of which is to give experiential priority to discovery of knowledge rather than to legislate knowledge into being, carries within its utterance its own form of (as DuPlessis has said of Oppen's writing) "rhetorical condensation"; and while certain feminist implications suggest themselves in DuPlessis' consideration of language, impressive beyond these stances currently deemed appropriate to gender is her thoroughgoing engagement with language, which makes of its radical alternative choice not a polemic but a discourse.

—MARJORIE WELISH

Peter Makin, Bunting: The Shaping Of His Verse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

In the October 16 *TLS* Makin's book was reviewed by Lachlan Mackinnon, who complained about its "unclarity of purpose" and "over-enthusiastic" praise for Bunting. The supposed unclarity of purpose has to do with Makin having been ambitious enough to use his reading of Bunting's sparse remarks on epistemology to criticize the work of Stanley Fish. One mustn't take a poet that seriously, you know! The excessive enthusiasm seems to involve claims made by Makin on behalf of work other

than *Briggflatts*, which is "not a great poem" but "the only poem of Bunting's likely to survive." Oh the smugness of it all! But then again what should one expect from a prophet capable of writing that "The modernists were rum figures, and it is perhaps only Helen Gardner's tedious Christian conventionality that has made Eliot seem so rational." "Rum figures"? Helen Gardner? Ouch!

But then the British, or at least a good many of them—you're *not* one of the admirable exceptions Mr. Mackinnon—never really caught on to modernism. And because they didn't (most of them) it has given Americans an excuse to ignore modern and contemporary British poetry. Which is too bad, because there is actually quite a lot of it that's rather good. Even among Bunting's own generation of poets born at the turn of the century Bunting is not quite the lonely figure he's sometimes made out to be. There is, for example, Joseph Gordon Macleod. If you haven't heard of him, you're not alone; I've yet to meet anyone on this continent who has. And yet, when his book-length poem *The Ecliptic* was published by Faber in 1930, Bunting called it the most interesting writing he'd encountered since *The Waste Land*. Morton Dawen Zabel of *Poetry* thought it the best of three first books by young British poets who were pointing the way to a brighter future for British poetry—the other two books were by Bunting and Auden. But the poem seems to have disappeared from our collective memory after 1949, when Kenneth Rexroth, one of the last American avant-gardists not to speak condescendingly of British poetry, reprinted a section of it in an anthology, lamenting the fact that "Macleod seems to have given up poetry." Actually, he'd given up on a Poundian modernism, adopted a pseudonym, and moved to the Hebrides. A long poem with flashes of brilliance and starchy passages of torpor, *The Ecliptic* deserves reprinting.

I'm feeling nasty this evening, so I'll say that until the *TLS* drowns in its own ink, the best British poets and critics will continue to run for the hinterlands. Peter Makin, one of the best British poetry critics, has a job in Japan, not exactly the hinterlands but safely removed from the so-called centers of English civilization. His book might do for Bunting (in a smaller way) what Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* did for Pound. For it is not only Bunting's work but Bunting's world that is scrutinized here. One example will have to suffice: St. Cuthbert. Now Cuthbert is only mentioned once in *Briggflatts*, and yet Makin is surely correct to identify his religious insight as central to the poem. So we get a whole chapter on Cuthbert and Northumbrian monasticism, because knowing something about Bunting's affinity for Cuthbert and St. Francis and others can help us think about the way the poem privileges silence:

> silence by silence sits
> and Then is diffused in Now.

And all this is preceded by a chapter on warriors, who represent the other extreme to Cuthbert, another Northumbria: between these two poles *Briggflatts* is wound, in intricate patterns of violent contrasts. Nobody else has brought so much of Northumbrian culture to bear upon the poem as has Makin. And if one reads Makin's book beside Peter Quartermain's excellent monograph on the political history of Northumbria—*Basil Bunting: Poet of the North* (Durham: Basil Bunting Archive, 1990)—one can begin to understand what it is that distinguishes Bunting's late poetry. It is his desire to make himself, to rethink himself, as a Northumbrian. In some ways this meant a retreat from the international modernism of his mentors Pound and Eliot, or so it seems to me. Or one might call it an advance rather than a retreat: these metaphors mean nothing.

In Makin's book there's first-rate discussion of quantity as Bunting understood its possibilities in English, convincing analysis of the prosody of some of the odes (with poems by Eliot, Cid Corman, and others thrown in). And the criticism of Stanley Fish's relativism is intelligent if somewhat cryptic. Makin on Fish: "Herein lies the falsity of the Fishian style of relativism. It purports to be anti-absolutist, to free us from supposed fixities; it is in fact built of such fixities, of absolutes, in the main terms of its sentences, and is used to free us from what (Bunting said) Aristotelian universals have always freed us from: 'the irritating complexities of a living situation.' It frees us from poems that might have meant things to their contemporaries." Makin picks his way through some sentences by Fish and Hayden White in making this point, which might be compared to the complaint Charles Bernstein and others have made about some of the poetry selected to represent a new and supposedly enlightened cultural diversity—the mode of the discourse works at cross purposes with the so-called progressive intentions of the author, editor, or anthologist.

I wonder if Fish will respond? Probably not, as word has it that he no longer reads much poetry—a friend told me that he once caught a graduate student reading poetry and told him that only graduate students read poetry—and thus is especially unlikely to read a book on a poet as unattended as Basil Bunting. Would that we had more critics like Makin to free us from the arrogance and tedium of some of our theorists' prose.

Ivan Argüelles, *"That" GODDESS* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)
Denyse Du Roi, *Filmmaking* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)
Andrew Joron, *Science Fiction* (Berkeley: Pantograph Press, 1992)

These three books of poetry introduce a new series from a new press in Berkeley (P.O. Box 9643, Berkeley, CA 94709). A letter to reviewers explains that the press is interested in "a new poetics of the Sublime," a postmodern "sublimity of dislocation" which bows to the "desiring machine" of the French nomadologists Deleuze and Guattari. I'm not convinced that the three books have all that much in common, but their propaganda insists that they all participate in "an experimentalism designed to (apposite notion!) *pleasure* the reader, richly addressed both to intellect and the sense, composed with the conviction that *poesis = ekstasis.*" Before I look briefly at each book, I might note that, to the best of my memory, Allen Ginsberg is the favorite poet of the authors of the *Anti-Oedipus.* Among the three poets of Pantograph, only Argüelles graphs his masturbatory panting with anything approaching the rapturous frenzy of Ginsberg. But Argüelles is much more the mandarin and classicist than Ginsberg ever was, and in some ways is more interesting for it.

Argüelles' book is the first book of an epic poem in the works, it seems, 105 pages written in the white heat of some two and half months early in 1990, if one can believe the dates appended to the poem. With more pure raw undiluted gushing spastic energy than I have encountered in some time, Argüelles plugs his unabashedly confused and lucid meditations and exhortations concerning women, myth, and culture into a loose adaptation of Virgilian epic. The book is one vast catalogue of the abjection, misogyny, lust, and ego-stroking that is manhood as the modernists mostly understood it, turning about the specter of the indescribable unapproachable woman smoking a cigarette in the banal pose of the femme fatale. I suspect feminists will not much like the book, for all its self-consciousness about the history of representation in patriarchal cultures. Having struggled through it with both exasperation and considerable interest, I just wish I knew more about what Stalin and Trotsky are doing in the poem. Altogether infuriating, self-indulgent and just plain too long, there's no denying the power of the poem, which is largely a product of the energies of its rhythms, varied nicely within and across the urtext, introduction, prelude, proemium—yes there's that much foreplay, so that the actual poem becomes something of a letdown—and the twelve cantos of the

book. There's nothing for it but to quote at some length from this gigantic "book of ignorance." Here is one of the more conventional passages, from the proemium:

> tell me oh muse of the man who went by trial
> of rock and water sunwhipped to found this changing shore
> who ran the wheel the world in reverse a-spin
> risking tide the surf spent salt-burnt to the quick
> his pores inhabited by the goddess' dangerous musk
> that can withstand no man until in elysium
> marked by the shadow of the embrace of one
> bare-armed the enigmatic as a sphinx conjured
> to lie forever unmasked that man went by trial
> of fire and mountain face into the perverse net
> stung by fortune's wasp who decked the surface
> with his own blood with courage to unite thumb
> to index-finger to defy the Immortals even their banquet
> scourged by heat and sirocco deserted by companions
> left to die alone adrift on the thought of nothing
> tell me what were his names his myriad pains
> his wrath his obsessions his conduct of life
> his mental struggles his artistic and spiritual inventions
> his infidelities as well as his positive attributes
> his opinions about the gods his knowledge of music
> his many masquerades his inabilities potential
> and real his favorite monies and poems
> his typical and multiple defeats his poverty
> his humiliations his lack of diplomacy
> his pornographic passions his ontological anguish
> his angst and ennui his knowledge of french
> of german of italian and latin and of sanskrit
> his knowledge of greek his pursuit of knowledge
> his disdain of statistics and money his fear of death
> his drinking habits his fondness for black dogs
> his political apathy his masturbating tendencies
> his ability to whistle entire symphonies his ache
> his nostalgia for the nameless his rootlessness
> his inability to speak on the phone his parents. . .

And so on and so on. Someone who hates to speak on the phone can't be all bad. Argüelles is a serious customer and I wish him luck in the godawful task of attempting yet another American epic.

Reading Andrew Joron's book I kept thinking that, first, the pertinent French guru here is Baudrillard rather than Deleuze and, second, that I've never encountered a poet who reminds me so much of the great English modernist Mina Loy. Joron's sculpted epigrammatic lines together with the odd and abstract lexicons of science and its simulacra must account for this second impression. Here, for instance, is the opening of an early poem by Loy called "Lunar Baedeker," as good an example as any of Loy's Laforguean idiom and idiosyncratic lineation:

A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies

Paris is livery
prepare
Lethe
for posthumous parvenus

Delirious avenues
lit
with the chandelier souls
of infusoria
from Pharaoh's tombstones

And here is the opening of Joron's "The Mind War":

The crippled woman walks
—her Mark IV exoskeleton
Hums

Her voice
Sealed inside another voice
—rasps like a feather
Made of metal
Except for a few black stars
The firmament is white

Joron's "experimentalism," such as it is, pertains to diction mostly, and has more in common with some of the projects of the historical avant-garde than with the more recent experiments of various language poetries. Indeed, as my comparison with Loy may suggest, there is not much that is really all that new about Joron's work, for all of his sophistication about fractured postmodern subjectivities. A preface announces his belief (derived from Lyotard I think) that the poetic "always exists on the border between the human and the inhuman." There are poems here that seem somehow *complete*, such as "Arise, Unblinded," "Smart Bomb," "Instructions to a Flea," "I am Joe's Brain," and "Petrified Music," and then there are poems like "Antenna" and "Agency" that read like pulp science fiction (the former) or graduate student aphorisms on theory (the latter). Like science itself, these poems are ultimately grounded in a kind of awe, which is, one supposes, where the sublime comes in. More unique than much of what passes under that tired old category of the "experimental" (yippee, another asyntactical surprise!) this book is well worth reading.

Among these three poets, I'm least impressed by Denyse Du Roi, who seems just another middle-class post-surrealist of the sort one once might have expected to find in *Unmuzzled Ox*. The book is dedicated to Ted Berrigan, and the poems show why. They're very much New York School revisited. Now I'll confess I never cared all that much for the mode (with some exceptions) so I'm probably not the one to comment on writing like the following:

> It's taken years to cultivate
> An ironic expression
> But the voice comes as a shock.
> The countryside is a suicide blonde
> Sprawling in a stained wine dress.
> Apple trees hold up their fruit
> Like roman coins that, judging from their
> Faces, would bite anyone who came near.

Maybe the apple trees will bite, but I won't.

Briefly Tooted

Let me also mention a few books that are worthy of notice but about which I can't be properly unfair, knowing the author or the publisher too well. Norman Finkelstein, who has written intelligently on Michael Palmer, Ronald Johnson, George Oppen, Robert Duncan and others, has a book of poems recently out from The University of Georgia Press, *Restless Messengers*, in the tradition of "high Jewish modernism," as the book's blurb

has it. More reassuring and less harassed and neurotic than most of what the blurbist must mean by "high Jewish modernism," these meditations have a gentle and sometimes melancholy wisdom that I respect and a prosody that sometimes could use a kick in the ass (sorry Norm!). Published under the imprint of the institution which doesn't begin to pay me enough is Hugh Seidman's *People Live, They Have Lives* (Miami University Press, 1992), his first collection in some ten years. David Ignatow once compared Seidman's work to Vallejo's, and while the comparison is flattering it makes some sense. I'm taken by the simple, direct, and at times even child-like diction and syntax as it veers off into the ineffable and the uncanny. I prefer the first half of the book to the second, which belabors a family history. Here is a poem from the first half, which the publisher will forgive me for quoting in full:

> The old Chinese stands and sleeps,
> and sways with the swaying car,
> like the stem of a plant underwater,
> and the leaf of his face breaking the water.
>
> And the fat woman in red sleeps,
> because red is the color of sleep.
> And the Hispanic girl closes her eyelids,
> like clouds on the moon and the sun.
>
> And the black messenger sleeps,
> his bird's head on his chest.
> And the blond with her child sleeps,
> sitting up as we bore through the dark.
>
> For now labor must be done
> by the poor from the planets of sleep,
> from the dust blown over the statues
> to the hard terrains and facades.

This is called "E Train-8:32 AM," a better New York poem than most for the way it makes its own space between documentarian and surrealist traditions.

—KEITH TUMA

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S most recent books are *A Poetics* (Harvard) and *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has recently written on Loy and Moore in relation to Pound and Zukofsky in relation to Niedecker. JAMES CLIFFORD is currently working on ways of understanding contemporary intercultural processes through the overlapping paradigms of travel, borders, and diasporas. CLARK COOLIDGE'S *Rova Improvisations* will appear this year from Sun & Moon. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is completing a translation of poetry and prose from Antonin Artaud's final 1945-48 period; his *Under World Arrest* will be published by Black Sparrow in 1994. ALLEN GINSBERG writes: "New book, poems, *Cosmopolitan Greetings 1985-92.* 4 CD Box Poems & Songs 1953-1992, Rhino Records, Fall 1993. *Hydrogen Jukebox*, opera with Philip Glass, Spoleto, Italy & USA Tour 1992." NORMA COLE'S most recent book is *My Bird Book;* forthcoming is *Mars* from Listening Chamber, Berkeley. AARON SHURIN'S newest book is *Into Distances* (Sun & Moon). Elizabeth Robinson writes: "I live in San Francisco and am a theology student. Most recent book is *String*, 1992, from French Broad Press in Asheville, NC." KEVIN MAGEE has other poems from *Tedium Drum* in *Avec, Hambone*, and *O-blek.* MICHAEL PALMER'S new collection of poetry, *At Passages*, will be published in 1993. His translation of Emmanuel Hocquard's *Theory of Tables* will appear soon from O-blek Press. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago, 1992). STEFAN G. REHM is a Doctoral student in German Literature at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. C.J. KEEP lives in Kingston, Ontario and is currently working on a hypertext installation for the Canada Council for the Arts. JED RASULA has completed "The American Poetry Wax Museum: Literacy Effects 1950-1990," which draws on several pieces published in *Sulfur.* JEROME ROTHENBERG'S forthcoming books are: *Gematria* (poems), Sun & Moon Press; *The Lorca Variations* (poems), New Directions; *Poems Performance Pieces Proses Plays Poetics* by Kurt Schwitters (tr. with Pierre Joris), Temple University Press. ELIOT WEINBERGER'S translation of Xavier Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* (with Octavio Paz's critical study of Villaurrutia; tr. by Esther Allen) has just been published by

Copper Canyon Press; Weinberger's second collection of essays, *Outside Stories*, was published fall 1992 by New Directions. PAMELA WYE'S art has recently been included in group shows at PS1, the Richard Anderson Gallery (NYC), and the Arkansas Art Center (Little Rock). *CASTING SEQUENCES*, Marjorie Welish's fourth volume of poems, is just out from the University of Georgia Press. A solo exhibition of her paintings may be seen at the E.M. Donahue Gallery in NYC in June. OSVALDO SANCHEZ is a Cuban writer and art critic living in Mexico. LIGERO SMITH lives in Brooklyn and is working on a review article on Dante in America. WILLIAM DORESKI has recently published poetry in *Seneca Review, Cimarros Review*, and *Swamproot*; he has published criticism in *Ariel, Harvard Review*, and *Paideuma*. ALLEN S. WEISS'S most recent book is *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism*, SUNY Press, 1992. ALAN GOLDING is completing *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* for the University of Wisconsin Press. MOLLY WEIGEL is working on an anthology in translation from *XUL* magazine. KEITH TUMA is now completing a manuscript which might be entitled *Fishing By Obstinate Isles: British Modernist Poetry and American Readers*.

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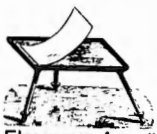

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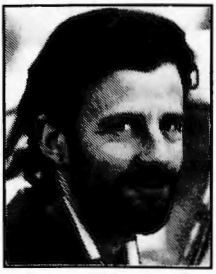

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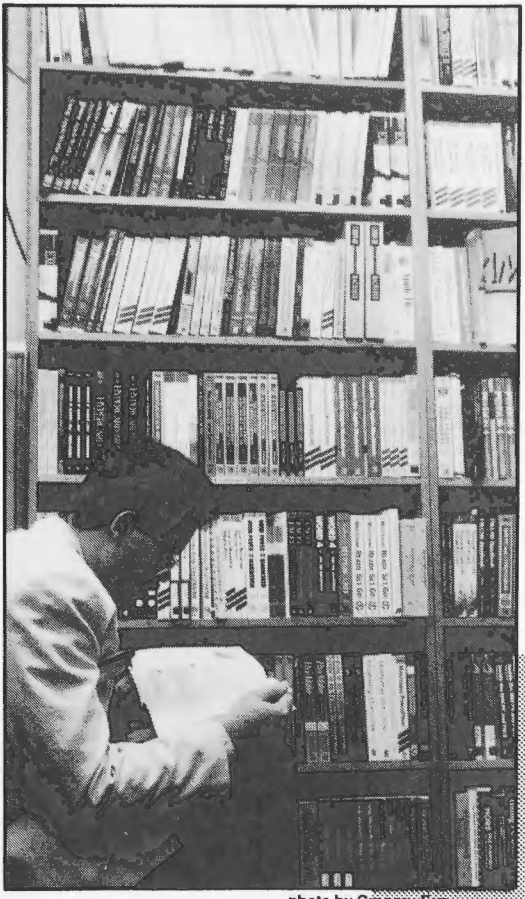

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